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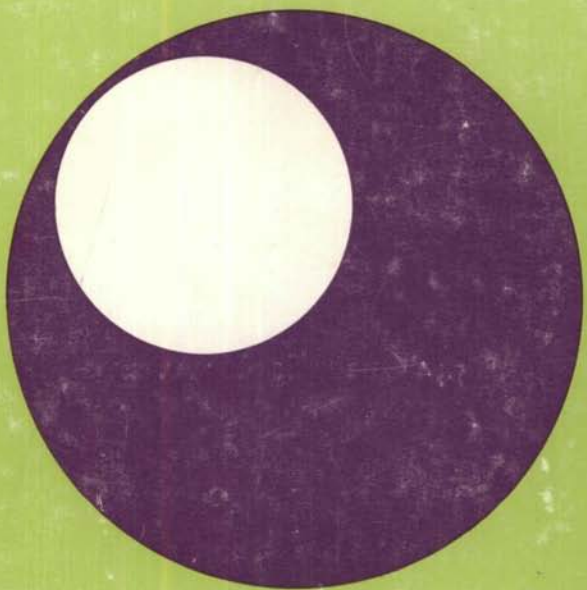

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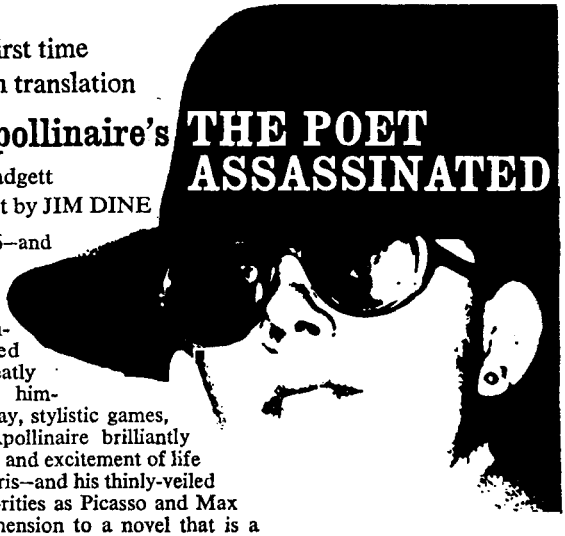

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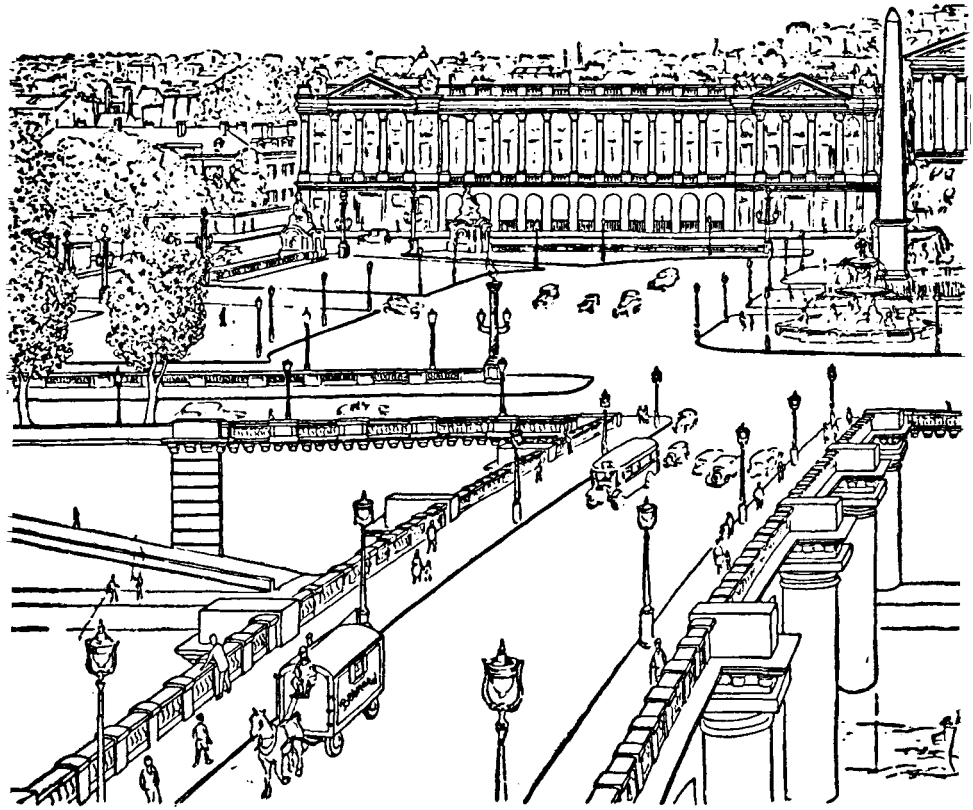

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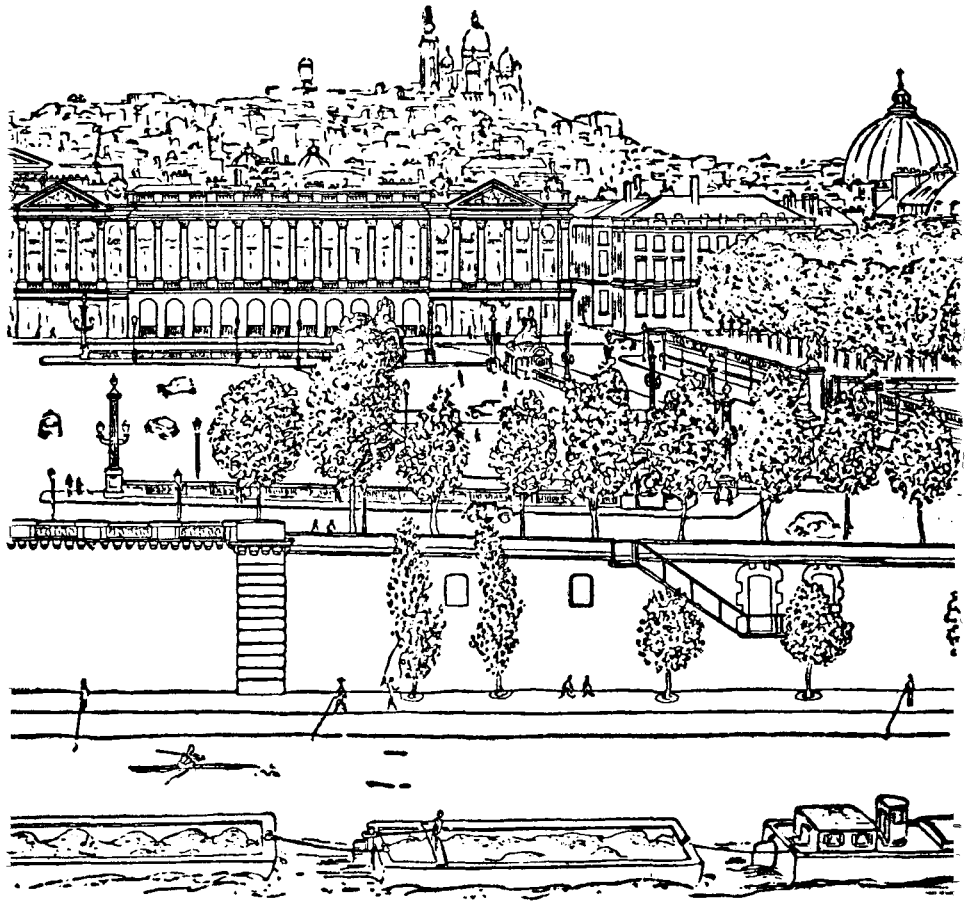

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Am Strande von Tanger

James Salter

Barcelona at dawn. The hotels are dark. All the great avenues are pointing to the sea.

The city is empty. Nico is asleep. She is bound by twisted sheets, by her long hair, by a naked arm which falls from beneath her pillow. She lies still, she does not even breathe.

In a cage outlined beneath a square of silk that is indigo blue and black, her bird sleeps, Kalil. The cage is in an empty fireplace which has been scrubbed clean. There are flowers beside it and a bowl of fruit. Kalil is asleep, his head beneath the softness of a wing.

Malcolm is asleep. His steel-rimmed glasses which he does not need—there is no prescription in them—lie open on the table. He sleeps on his back and his nose rides the dream world like a keel. This nose, his mother's nose or at least a replica of his mother's, is like a theatrical device, a strange decoration that has been pasted on his face. It is the first thing one notices about him. It is the first thing one likes. The nose in a sense is a mark of commitment to life. It is a large nose which cannot be hidden. In addition, his teeth are bad.

At the very top of the four stone spires which Gaudi left unfinished the light has just begun to bring forth gold inscriptions too pale yet to read. There is no sun. There is only a white silence. Sunday morning. The early mornings of Spain. A mist covers all of the hills which surround the city. The stores are closed.

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Nico has come out on the terrace after her bath. The towel is wrapped around her, water still glistens on her skin.

"It's cloudy," she says. "It's not a good day for the sea."

Malcolm looks up.

"It may clear," he says.

Morning. Villa-Lobos is playing on the phonograph. The cage is on a stool in the doorway. Malcolm lies in a canvas chair eating an orange. He is in love with the city. He has a deep attachment to it based in part on a story by Paul Morand and also on an incident which occured in Barcelona years before: one evening in the twilight Antonio Gaudi, mysterious, fragile, even saintlike, the city's great architect, was hit by a streetcar as he walked to church. He was very old, white beard, white hair, dressed in the simplest of clothes. No one recognized him. He lay in the street without even a cab to drive him to the hospital. Finally he was taken to the charity ward. He died the day Malcolm was born.

The apartment is on Avenida General Mitre and her tailor, as Nico calls him, is near Gaudi's cathedral at the other end of town. It's a working class neighborhood, there's a faint smell of garbage. The site is surrounded by walls. There are quatrefoils printed in the sidewalk. Soaring above everything, the spires. *Sanctus*, *sanctus*, they cry. They are hollow. The cathedral was never completed. Its doors lead both ways into open air. Malcolm has walked, in the calm Barcelona evening, around this empty monument many times. He has stuffed peseta notes, virtually worthless, into the slot marked: donations to continue the work. It seems on the other side they are simply falling to the ground or, he listens closely, a priest wearing glasses locks them in a wooden box.

Malcolm believes in Malraux and Max Weber: art is the real history of nations. In the details of his person there is evidence of a process not fully complete. It is the making of a man into a true instrument. He is preparing for the arrival of that great artist he one day expects to be, an artist in the truly modern sense which is to say without accomplishments but with the conviction of genius. An artist freed from the demands of craft, an artist of concepts, generosity, his work is the creation

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of the legend of himself. So long as he is provided with even a single follower he can believe in the sanctity of this design.

He is happy here. He likes the wide, tree-cool avenues, the restaurants, the long evenings. He is deep in the currents of a slow, connubial life.

Nico comes onto the terrace wearing a wheat-colored sweater.

"Would you like a coffee?" she says. "Do you want me to go down for one?"

He thinks for a moment.

"Yes," he says.

"How do you like it?"

"*Solo*," he says.

"Black."

She likes to do this. The building has a small elevator which rises slowly. When it arrives she steps in and closes the doors carefully behind her. Then, just as slowly, she descends, floor after floor, as if they were decades. She thinks about Malcolm. She thinks about her father and his second wife. She is probably more intelligent than Malcolm, she decides. She is certainly stronger-willed. He, however, is better-looking in a strange way. She has a wide, senseless mouth. He is generous. She knows she is a little dry. She passes the second floor. She looks at herself in the mirror. Of course, one doesn't discover these things right away. It's like a play, it unfolds slowly, scene by scene, the reality of another person changes. Anyway, pure intelligence is not that important. It's an abstract quality. It does not include that cruel, intuitive knowledge of how the new life, a life her father would never understand, should be lived. Malcolm has that.

At ten thirty, the phone rings. She answers and talks in German, lying on the couch. After it is finished Malcolm calls to her,

"Who was that?"

"Do you want to go to the beach?"

"Yes."

"Inge is coming in about an hour," Nico says.

He has heard about her and is curious. Besides, she has a car.

The morning, obedient to his desires, has begun to change.

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There is some early traffic on the avenue beneath. The sun breaks through for a moment, disappears, breaks through again. Far off, beyond his thoughts, the four potent spires are passing between shadow and glory. In intervals of sunlight the letters on high reveal themselves: *Hosanna*.

Smiling, at noon, Inge arrives. She is in a camel skirt and a blouse with the top buttons undone. She's a bit heavy for the skirt which is very short. Nico introduces them.

"Why didn't you call last night?" Inge asks.

"We were going to call but it got so late. We didn't have dinner till eleven," Nico explains. "I was sure you'd be out."

No. She was waiting at home all night for her boyfriend to call, Inge says. She is fanning herself with a postcard from Madrid. Nico has gone into the bedroom.

"They're such bastards," Inge says. Her voice is raised to carry. "He was supposed to call at eight. He didn't call me until ten. He didn't have time to talk. He was going to call back in a little while. Well, he never called. I finally fell asleep."

Nico puts on a pale grey skirt with many small pleats and a lemon pullover. She looks at the back of herself in the mirror. Her arms are bare. Inge is talking from the front room.

"They don't know how to behave, that's the trouble. They don't have any idea. They go to the Polo Club, that's the only thing they know."

She begins to talk to Malcolm.

"When you go to bed with someone it should be nice afterwards, you should treat each other decently. Not here. They have no respect for a woman."

She has green eyes and white, even teeth. He is thinking of what it would be like to have such a mouth. Her father is supposed to be a surgeon. In Hamburg. Nico says it isn't true.

"They are children here," Inge says. "In Germany, now, you have a little respect. A man doesn't treat you like that, he knows what to do."

"Nico," he calls.

She comes in brushing her hair.

"I am frightening him," Inge explains. "Do you know what I finally did? I called at five in the morning. I said, why

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didn't you call? I don't know, he said—I could tell he was asleep—what time is it? Five o'clock, I said. Are you angry with me? A little, he said. Good, because I am angry with you. Bang, I hung up."

Nico is closing the doors to the terrace and bringing the cage inside.

"It's warm," Malcolm says, "leave him there. He needs the sunlight."

She looks in at the bird.

"I don't think he's well," she says.

"He's all right."

"The other one died last week," she explains to Inge. "Suddenly. He wasn't even sick."

She closes one door and leaves the other open. The bird sits in the now brilliant sunshine, feathered, serene.

"I don't think they can live alone," she says.

"He's fine," Malcolm assures her. "Look at him."

The sun makes his colors very bright. He sits on the uppermost perch. His eyes have perfect, round lids. He blinks.

The elevator is still at their floor. Inge enters first. Malcolm pulls the narrow doors to. It's like shutting a small cabinet. Faces close together they start down. Malcolm is looking at Inge. She has her own thoughts.

They stop for another coffee at the little bar downstairs. He holds the door open for them to go in. No one is there—a single man reading the newspaper.

"I think I'm going to call him again," Inge says.

"Ask him why he woke you up at five in the morning," Malcolm says.

She laughs.

"Yes," she says. "That's marvelous. That's what I'm going to do."

The telephone is at the far end of the marble counter. Nico is talking to him and he cannot hear.

"Aren't you interested?" he asks.

"No," she says.

Inge's car is a blue Volkswagen, the blue of certain air-mail envelopes. One fender is dented in.

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"You haven't seen my car," she says. "What do you think? Did I get a good bargain? I don't know anything about cars. This is my first. I bought it from someone I know, a painter, but it was in an accident. The motor is scorched.

"I know how to drive," she says. "It's better if someone sits next to me, though. Can you drive?"

"Of course," he says.

He gets behind the wheel and starts the engine. Nico is sitting in the back.

"How does it feel to you?" Inge says.

"I'll tell you in a minute."

Although it's only a year old, the car has a certain shabbiness. The material on the ceiling is faded. Even the steering wheel seems abused. After they have driven a few blocks, Malcolm says,

"It seems all right."

"Yes?"

"The brakes are a little weak."

"They are?"

"I think they need new linings."

"I just had it greased," she says.

Malcolm looks at her. She is quite serious.

"Turn left here," she says.

She directs him through the city. There is a little traffic now but he seldom stops. Many intersections in Barcelona are widened out in the shape of an octagon. There are only a few red lights. They drive through vast neighborhoods of old apartments, past factories, the first vacant fields at the edge of town. Inge turns in her seat to look back to Nico.

"I'm sick of this place," she says. "I want to go to Rome."

They are passing the airport. The road to the sea is crowded. All the scattered traffic of the city has funneled onto it, buses, trucks, innumerable small cars.

"They don't even know how to drive," Inge says. "What are they doing? Can't you pass?

"Oh, come on," she says. She reaches across him to blow the horn.

"No use doing that," Malcolm says.

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Inge blows it again.

"They can't move."

"Oh, they make me furious," she cries.

Two children in the car ahead have turned around. Their faces are pale and reflective in the small rear window.

"Have you been to Sitges?" Inge says.

"Cadaques."

"Ah," she says. "Yes. Beautiful. There you have to know someone with a villa."

The sun is white. The land lies beneath it the color of straw. The road runs parallel to the coast past cheap bathing beaches, camp grounds, houses, hotels. Between the road and the sea is the railroad with small tunnels built beneath it for bathers to reach the water. After a while this begins to disappear. They drive along almost deserted stretches.

"In Sitges," Inge says, "are all the blonde girls of Europe. Sweden, Germany, Holland. You'll see."

Ah, the hunter's nose. It deflects just slightly, imperceptibly, in her direction.

"The brown eyes of the Spaniards are irresistible to them," she says.

She reaches across him to blow the horn.

"Look at them! Look at them crawling along!

"They come here full of hopes," Inge says. "They save their money, they buy little bathing suits you could put in a spoon, and what happens? They get loved for one night, perhaps, that's all. The Spanish don't know how to treat women."

Nico is silent in the back. On her face is the calm expression which means she is bored.

"They know nothing," Inge says.

Sitges is a little town with damp hotels, the green shutters, the dying grass of a beach resort. There are cars parked everywhere. The streets are lined with them. Finally they find a place two blocks from the sea.

"Be sure it's locked," Inge says.

"Nobody's going to steal it."

"Now you don't think it's so nice," she says.

They walk along the pavement the surface of which seems

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to have buckled in the heat. All around are the flat, undecorated façades of houses built too close together. Despite the cars, the town is strangely vacant. It's two o'clock. Everyone is at lunch.

Malcolm has a pair of shorts made from rough cotton, the blue glazed cotton of the Tauregs. They have a little belt, slim as a finger, which goes only half way around. He feels powerful as he puts them on. He has a runner's body, a body without flaws, the body of a martyr in a Flemish painting. One can see vessels laid like cord beneath the surface of his limbs. The cabins have a concrete back wall and hemp underfoot. His clothes hang shapeless from a peg. He steps into the corridor. The women are still undressing, he does not know behind which door. There is a small mirror hung from a nail. He smooths his hair and waits. Outside is the sun.

The sea begins with a sloping course of pebbles sharp as nails. Malcolm goes in first. Nico follows without a word. The water is cool. He feels it climb his legs, touch the edge of his suit and then with a swell, he tries to leap high enough, embrace him. He dives. He comes up smiling. The taste of salt is on his lips. Nico has dived, too. She emerges close by, softly, and draws her wetted hair behind her with one hand. She stands with her eyes half-closed, not knowing exactly where she is. He slips an arm around her waist. She smiles. She possesses a certain, sure instinct of when she is most beautiful. For a moment they are in serene dependence. He lifts her in his arms and carries her, helped by the sea, towards the deep. Her head rests on his shoulder. Inge lies on the beach in her bikini reading *Stern*.

"What's wrong with Inge?" he says.

"Everything."

"No, doesn't she want to come in?"

"She's having her period," Nico says.

They lie down beside her on separate towels. She is, Malcolm notices, very brown. Nico can never get that way no matter how long she stays outside. It is almost a kind of stubbornness as if he, himself, were offering her the sun and she would not accept.

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She got this tan in a single day, Inge tells them. A single day! It seems unbelievable. She looks at her arms and legs as if confirming it. Yes, it's true. Naked on the rocks at Cadaques. She looks down at her stomach and in doing so induces it to reveal several plump, girlish rolls.

"You're getting fat," Nico says.

Inge laughs. Two Spanish youths are strolling past along the sea.

"They are my savings," she says.

They seem like that, like belts, like part of some costume she is wearing. When she lies back, they are gone. Her limbs are clean. Her stomach, like the rest of her, is covered with a faint, golden down.

She is talking to the sky. If she goes to America, she recites, is it worthwhile to bring her car? After all, she got it at a very good price, she could probably sell it if she didn't want to keep it and make some money.

"America is full of Volkswagens," Malcolm says.

"Yes?"

"It's filled with German cars, everyone has one."

"They must like them," she decides. "The Mercedes is a good car."

"Greatly admired," Malcolm says.

"That's the car I would like. I would like a couple of them. When I have money, that will be my hobby," she says. "I'd like to live in Tangier."

"Quite a beach there."

"Yes? I will be black as an Arab."

"Better wear your suit," Malcolm says.

Inge smiles.

Nico seems asleep. They lie there silent, their feet pointed to the sun. The strength of it has gone. There are only passing moments of warmth when the wind dies all the way and the sun is flat upon them, weak but flooding. An hour of melancholy is approaching, the hour when everything is ended.

At six o'clock Nico sits up. She is cold.

"Come," Inge says, "we'll go for a walk up the beach."

She insists on it. The sun has not set. She becomes very playful.

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"Come," she says, "it's the good section, all the big villas are there. We'll walk along and make the old men happy."

"I don't want to make anyone happy." Nico says, hugging her arms.

"It isn't so easy," Inge assures her.

Nico goes along sullenly. She is holding her elbows. The wind is from the shore. There are little waves now which seem to break in silence. The sound they make is soft, as if forgotten. Nico is wearing a grey tank-suit with an open back, and while Inge plays before the houses of the rich, she looks at the sand.

Inge goes into the sea. Come, she says, it's warm. She is laughing and happy, her gaiety is stronger than the hour, stronger than the cold. Malcolm walks slowly in behind her. The water *is* warm. It seems purer as well. And it is empty, as far in each direction as one can see. They are bathing in it alone. The waves swell and lift them gently. The water runs over them, laving the soul.

At the entrance to the cabins the young Spanish boys stand around waiting for a glimpse if the shower door is opened too soon. They wear blue woolen trunks. Also black. Their feet appear to have very long toes. There is only one shower and in it a single, whitened tap. The water is cold. Inge goes first. Her suit appears, one small piece and then the other, draped over the top of the door. Malcolm waits. He can hear the soft slap and passage of her hands, the sudden shattering of the water on concrete when she moves aside. The boys at the door exalt him. He glances out. They are talking in low voices. They reach out to tease each other, to make an appearance of play.

The streets of Sitges have changed. An hour has struck which announces evening, and everywhere there are strolling crowds. It's difficult to stay together. Malcolm has an arm around each of them. They drift to his touch like horses. Inge smiles. People will think the three of them do it together, she says.

They stop at a cafe. It isn't a good one, Inge complains.

"It's the best," Nico says simply. It is one of her qualities

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that she can tell at a glance, wherever she goes, which is the right place, the right restaurant, hotel.

"No," Inge insists.

Nico seems not to care. They wander on separated now, and Malcolm whispers,

"What is she looking for?"

"Don't you know?" Nico says.

"You see these boys?" Inge says. They are seated in another place, a bar. All around them, tanned limbs, hair faded from the long, baking afternoons, young men sit with the sweet stare of indolence.

"They have no money," she says. "None of them could take you to dinner. Not one of them. They have nothing.

"This is Spain," she says.

Nico chooses the place for dinner. She has become a different person during the day. The presence of this friend, this girl she casually shared a life with during the days they both were struggling to find themselves in the city, before she knew anybody or even the names of streets, when she was so sick that they wrote out a cable to her father together—they had no telephone—this sudden revelation of Inge seems to have deprived the past of decency. All at once she is pierced by a certainty that Malcolm feels contempt for her. Her confidence, without which she is nothing, has gone. The tablecloth seems white and dazzling. It seems to be illuminating the three of them with remorseless light. The knives and forks are laid out as if for surgery. The plates lie cold. She is not hungry but she doesn't dare refuse to eat. Inge is talking about her boyfriend.

"He is terrible," she says, "he is heartless. But I understand him. I know what he wants.

"Anyway a woman can't hope to be everything to a man. It isn't natural. A man needs a number of women."

"You're crazy," Nico says.

"It's true."

The statement is all that was needed to demoralize her. Malcolm is inspecting the strap of his watch. It seems to Nico he is permitting all this. He is stupid, she thinks. This girl is from a low background and he finds that interesting. She thinks be-

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cause they go to bed with her they will marry her. Of course not. Never. Nothing, Nico thinks, could be farther from the truth, though even as she thinks she knows she may be wrong.

They go to Chez Swann for a coffee. Nico does not sit with them. She is tired, she says. She curls up on one of the couches and goes to sleep. She is exhausted. The evening has become quite cool.

A voice awakens her, music, a marvelous voice amid occasional phrases of the guitar. Nico hears it in her sleep and sits up. Malcolm and Inge are talking. The song is like something long-awaited, something they have been searching for. She reaches over and touches his arm.

"Listen," she says.

"What?"

"Listen," she says, "it's Maria Pradera."

"Maria Pradera?"

"The words are beautiful," Nico says.

Simple phrases. She repeats them, as if they were litany. Mysterious repetitions: dark-haired mother... dark-haired child. The eloquence of the poor, worn smooth and pure as a stone.

Malcolm listens patiently but he hears nothing. She can see it: he has changed, he has been poisoned while she slept with stories of a hideous Spain fed bit by bit until now they are drifting through his veins, a Spain devised by a woman who knows she can never be more than part of what a man needs. Inge is calm. She believes in herself, Nico thinks. She believes in her right to exist, to command.

The road is dark. They have opened the roof to the night, a night so dense with stars that they seem to be pouring into the car. Nico, in the back, feels abandoned. Inge is talking. She reaches over to blow the horn at cars which are going too slow. Malcolm allows it. There are private rooms in Barcelona where, with her lover, Inge spent winter afternoons before a warm, crackling fire. There are houses where they made love on blankets of fur. Of course, he was nice then. She had visions of the Polo Club, of dinner parties in the best houses.

The streets of the city are almost deserted. It is nearly mid-

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night, Sunday midnight. The day in the sun has wearied them, the sea has drained them of strength. They drive to General Mitre and say goodnight through the windows of the car. The elevator rises very slowly. They are hung with silence. They look at the floor like gamblers who have lost.

The apartment is dark. Nico turns on a light and then vanishes. Malcolm washes his hands. He dries them. The rooms seem very still. He begins to walk through them slowly and finds her, as if she had fallen, on her knees in the doorway to the terrace. The bird is dead.

Malcolm looks at the cage. Kalil has fallen to the floor.

"Give him a little brandy on the corner of a handkerchief," he says.

She has opened the cage door.

"He's dead," she says.

"Let me see."

He is stiff. The small feet are curled and dry as twigs. He seems lighter somehow. The breath has left his feathers. A heart no bigger than an orange seed has ceased to beat. The cage sits empty in the cold doorway. There seems nothing to say. Malcolm closes the door.

Later, in bed, he listens to her sobs. He tries to comfort her but he cannot. Her back is turned to him. She will not answer.

She has small breasts and large nipples. Also, as she herself says, a rather large behind. Her father has three secretaries. Hamburg is close to the sea.

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Joseph Ceravolo

Ho Ho Ho Caribou

for Rosemary

I

Leaped at the caribou.
My son looked at the caribou.
The kangaroo leaped on the
fruit tree. I am a white
man and my children
are hungry
which is like paradise.
The doll is sleeping.
It lay down to creep into
the plate.
It was clean and flying.

II

Where you… the axes
are. Why is this home so
hard. So much
like the sent over the
courses below the home
having a porch.

Felt it on my gate in the place
where caribous jumped

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over. Where geese sons
and pouches of daughters look at
me and say "I'm hungry
daddy".

III

Not alone in the
gastrouse desert. We are looking
at the caribous out in the water
swimming around. We
want to go in the ocean
along the dunes.
Where do we like?
  Like little lice in the sand
we look into a fruit expanse.
Oh the sky is so cold.
We run into the water.
Lice in heaven.

IV

My heel. Ten o'clock the class.
Underwater fish
brush by us. Oh leg
not reaching!
The show is stopping
at the sky to drive in the
truck. Tell us where to
stop and eat. And
drink which comes to us out
in the sand is
                at a star.
My pants are damp.
Is tonight treating us
but not reaching through the window.

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V

Where is that bug going?
Why are your hips
rounded as the sand?
What is jewelry?

Baby sleeps. Sleeping on
the cliff is dangerous.
The television of all voice is
way far behind.
Do we flow nothing?
Where did you follow that bug
to?
  See quick... is flying.

VI

Caribou, what have I
done? See how her
heart moves like a little
bug... under my thumb.
Throw me deeply.
I am the floos.
Ho ho ho caribou,
light brown and wetness
caribou. I stink and
I know it.
"Screw you! ...you're right.

VII

Every one has seen us out
with the caribou but
no one has seen us out in

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the car. You passed
beyond us.
We saw your knees
but the other night we
couldn't call you.
You were more far than a
widow feeling you.
Nothing has been terrible.
We are the people who have
been running with
animals.
More than when we run?

VIII

Tell us where o eat to stop and eat.
The diner is never gonna come.
The forest things are passing.
I did drink my milk
like a mother of wolves.
Wolves on the desert
of ice cold love, of
fireproof breasts and the breast
I took like snow.
Following me
I love you
and I fall beyond
and I eat you like a
bow and arrow withering in the
desert.

IX

No one should be mean.
Making affection and all the green

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winters wide awake.
Blubber is desert. Out on
the firm lake, a firm
and aboriginal kiss.
To dance, to hunt, to sing,
no one should be mean.
Not needing these things.

X

Like a flower, little light, you open
and we make believe
we die. We die all around
you like a snake in a
well and we come up out
of the warm well and
are born again out of dry
mammas, nourishing mammas, always
holding you as I
love you and am
revived inside you, but
die in you and am
never born again in
the same place; never
stop!

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Laurance Wieder

The Seismographic Ear

The reason that I choose this flat
Prosey tone is that I know the truth
Will not be found in elaborate fountains
Which evocative gush refracting images
To daze, sparkle, reticulate and astound
Cleaved sense. Such truths as may exist
Exist by dint of silence, distinct fragrance
Or by simple quiet phrases which put to bed
All doubts. For example, I was born
A simple salmon in the river without words
Though learned them later and employed
Figures, arabesques, leaps, deletions and inflections
With great echoes to obtain, retain and nurture
Eggs, out of the ocean, over the dam, spawn.
It's possible to get with words. The big words
(Destiny say or cosmically) beget big getters
Who card the words and deal them, call the game
Watch the pot get bigger, then take the whole river-boat
For a ride, relying on a derringer at the wrist
To deal with emergencies. I tend to despise
People who talk truth, they unwittingly commit lies
Which after all denies not that men are fallible
But that if not causation at least ending is inevitable.
Once the children played cowboys in the ruined garden

Is an image of lost innocence, or decay, or possibly death
But it doesn't make me want to catch my breath
With wonder, after I moved from my small garden
Apartment to live closer to the university with a lady
Whom I love, desire, and who loves me back
And better than anybody else. I include these facts

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With others I consider in the elementary category
Though I might also include mortality, distance,
Hunger and intuitive psychology in the list since
Here is the vibrant center which is everywhere anyway
And lost,—crises made the breaking of the structures
Not due to silence but to me who put them here.
Sometimes I wonder which voice is mine, I hear
The dust accumulating everywhere like dead snow
On bleak eaves, fields, aluminum storm windows
Is also connotative, suggests words which float
From transmitter to receiver, from dusk to dark.
Plucked, the string vibrates about a single line
Tending rest and motion, an attempt to hold them both
At once, and likewise inspiration seizes on
Two states and makes them one, holds them
Together in a dream of union, just like Lincoln
Until the vibrations come too intense and
A thin glass shatters in the dining room.

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Diane di Prima

Song for Spring Equinox

It is the first day of spring, the children are singing
(they are supposed to be sleeping) the clock is ticking
the cats are waiting for supper, one of them pregnant
kittens to herald the spring, nothing is blooming
nothing seems to bloom much around farms, just hayfields
and corn
farms are too pragmatic, I look at ads
for hydrangea bushes, which I hate they remind me of
brooklyn

for chinese wisteria vines, which I can't picture
but they sound exotic and mysterious
a kind of blue purple, I decide I'll get some

will I be disappointed, will they be yellow?
will I hate the Shetland pony we are buying
will we run out of wholewheat flour this week
before a new supply drives up from the city?

oh, it is very like being a pioneer,
but then everything is in this country, and in the country
especially. it was like being a pioneer on 5th street, too
and houston street, and amsterdam avenue
and in brooklyn, under the streetlights growing up
rollerskating at dusk with stickball games in the street
was the most pioneery of all,

it is slightly boring,
it tastes a lot of the times crossword puzzle
and ordering things thru the mail, which never come
or turn out wrong, or come the wrong color (wisteria)

I can't blame Alan for planning to go to India
to free his kundalini, so that his ears peel
or something dreadful happens to his physique
we are built for the exotic, we americans, this landscape leaves us
as open as a piece of chocolate cream pie

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What's Your Story

Ronald Sukenick

The moon is out and full. The sky is that near blue of bright clear nights, so bright that one can see only a few of the brightest stars. On the horizon the sharp, barren mountains, then the desert, like a sea. Here the barren ground, the vulnerable figure protected by its sleep, and that peculiarly self-contained lion. One assumes he—or is it she—is asleep, though from the look of the face he might be dead, the skin blackened by the desert sun. This perhaps would explain the quiescence of the lion. Natural repugnance for dead meat strike carrion. Leather bones rotten meat. Dead one would say, from the odd angle of the feet protruding from the robe strike striped robe that could be by Noland or Morris Louis, from the exposed teeth, the eyes open perhaps very slightly. Or is he about to awake, the eyes opening strike the eyes on the point of opening, to confront the lion with his stick and his mandolin, or is it lute, by his side. Next to the lute, we'll call it a lute, a brown jug, of water let's hope, then a thick band of white, then brown, white, brownish-white, muddied water, snow, rotting ice, a boat making its way through ice floes, a person in the bow pushes aside a floating cake of ice with a stick and his foot, others pole the boat, in the stern one man handles the rudder, in the center a man standing one foot on the gunwale, hand on knee, cocked hat, sword, big nose, behind him a flag, American, partly furled. One would say it's cold out there. This scene repeated again again again, a fleet of facsimiles, it heads for a slightly projecting, off-white vertical, a recess, an-

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other narrower vertical of the same color, snow on the ground, part of a stone wall—large rocks trimmed with snow—a tree trunk rising from the ground straight, a brown tangle of bushes, a snowy field, at the left a road recedes, curves, and disappears further to the left, cutting through bare trees, brown bushes, green pines, misty distance, background of grey sky through bare boughs strike background of grey sky through lattice of bare boughs. High, a jet growls once, twice, fades. Drip of melting snow from eaves. A gunshot echoes through the distance. I look to the left through a window at right angles to the first: black boughs, a road, snowy field, low wall of piled rocks, woods, horizon of soft contoured hills, grey light of wintry afternoon. The bright morning light floods the fields, lights up the woods, shapes the hills. The field beyond the road is brown and green with patches of snow. The air is blue, the breeze a blue breath, the trees sway at the bottom of a sea of blue. Heavy grey clouds lower over the brown, barren flatland. Pit in concentric pit lay sunken in the center of a huge concavity, mud-yellow, rimmed by a rutted road. Greasy black smoke against dirty grey sky. Gulls like swarms of flies hover, drift, swoop in a huge, slow vortex, screaming like harpies. A shaft of late afternoon sun strike a shaft of yellowish late afternoon sun glints off broken bits of tin, shattered glass, then disappears. The fires redden the deepening shadows. One cannot see much in the cobbled court, the limestone blocks of the building, windows like a Renaissance palazzo. The smoky, lucent, humid winter air, pearl-grey, seeps down to the bottom of the court. From where I sit at my escritoire, and from there only, I can see out the courtyard through an arch, through an arch through an arch, beyond a slim, distant, tapered column, a dark massive monumental arch suspended in the haze. There is so much movement down in the street it is as if one were watching strike as if one were looking into a motley collection of fish in an overcrowded tank, frightened by an occult cause, rather than at men women children dogs cats baby carriages carts cars trucks buses. The noise is so constant it is part of the landscape, like the tenements across the Avenue. Here there is no

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weather. Large flakes of soot fall visibly from the sky. The atmosphere consists of carbon, sulphur, oxides that displace the air and seep through the windows. From the courtyard unbelievably loud a broken hearted lover wails a high fidelity lament in an incomprehensible dialect of Spanish. The hills are absent beyond the visible circumference of misty woods within which the fields, green-brown, patches strike occasional remnants of last night's flurries, the road to where it curves. The mist glows with its own inner light, very intime, tracing the nearer trees in heavy chiaroscuro, the more distant trees rise like ghosts from a graveyard. The woods lack depth. Light filters between the trunks from somewhere off-stage. A clump of pines looms heavy, without color. Mist muffles bare boughs, hangs from the tips of branches in shimmering drops. The stillness is part of the landscape, like the stone wall at the far end of the field that is there, but invisible. Now and then the house creaks the obscure complaints of its two hundred years. George Washington crosses the Delaware on the walls. Under the moon the lion watches, the figure sleeps, or wakes up, or rots. I sit at my desk and gaze into the mysterious woods. The desk, square, classical proportions. One thinks of the richer Colonial houses, or better, English of the Augustan period. Its lamp, wood, glass, suggesting wick and whale oil, its shaded bulb an incongruity. We're getting to know one another, this desk and I, we're learning to get along. Already we're getting to be friends. There's a flat, clear, open quality about it, a lucidity, a balance, an obvious and unquestionable respectability. No there's nothing suspect about this desk, nothing secret or ambiguous, nothing baroque, nothing intense, nothing intricate. Nothing like desks where I've holed up and held out. Safe at last. The fields are bright, the desk is lit by a shaft of light coming through the woods, George Washington crosses the Delaware on the walls. Wild grey clouds scud low beneath the black sky, gulls flock and hover about this point or that, so many they seem more like swarms of flies. Fires flare along the sides of the pit, sending up thick black smoke that disappears into the black of the sky. The desk is a large black rectangle with drawers running down one side.

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The glossy desk-top reflects the light of the gooseneck lamp in one corner. In the center of the large black rectangle, the smaller white strike the white rectangle of an open notebook. The open page said: ever clearly known it and tested it. It was as though unperceiving I had awakened from the American dream of tomorrow to the flat truth of today. Black ink, my handwriting.

Why don't you get rid of that desk asked Joan. Relevant to nothing, as usual. Her large, dark eyes, with their distended irises, shone with the black luster of my desk-top as she stared at me with her characteristic vacant expression.

Why? I asked.

I don't know.

Look I have to work now. I had stolen the desk and I was fond of it.

I suppose you want me to leave she said.

What would you like to do.

She shrugged and started putting her clothes back on. She was a terrific piece of ass, a slim fertility goddess, dazed with too much fucking and too many abortions. Later, after I put her into a story, after a lot of aimless traveling, a sexual tourist, she wound up marrying an Iraqi sheik, and went to live in a harem in Baghdad. She was a passive lay but she liked it, and she never complained about anything. I felt a little bad about letting her leave like that, right after making love, but I knew she was sleeping with two other guys, both older and with a lot more bread than me, a student, and both of whom wanted to marry her. So what the hell. You wouldn't have thought so, but I loved Joan, with the kind of desperation you have when you love something that you want to get away from. I kept comparing her to Josephine, who I knew from around McDougal Street, another extreme case, but a kind I had a lot more respect for. Joan liked money, she liked glamor, she liked secrets, she liked to make her hole the subject of exciting high intrigue. Josephine didn't give a damn. She fucked who she wanted, when she wanted, how she wanted, and she didn't bother to make a secret of it. She never knew where her next penny was coming from. If she really liked a man she had his

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baby. She had two already and she took them wherever she went. She tossed over all the moral garbage we use for ballast, and she acted as if nothing could hurt her. Dead now. These were the crazy people I knew then, all extreme cases, all failures every one of them, driven way out by the grey fifties. I liked failures. I aimed at being one myself some day. I was living in Cambridge, a graduate student, surrounded by Harvard, Radcliffe, M.I.T. I lived across from the dump. It was more picturesque, in its way, than Harvard Square. I had one old friend there, a painter, even poorer than myself. I had traveled across country with him in an old Ford before we'd gone to college, Route 66, El Paso, Old Glory Arizona to the Coast. You could see him getting crazier every day, psychoanalysis didn't help. He'd quit a high-paying job as a commercial artist, and did nothing but lay around his cheap apartment drinking and watching television. He never went out. Finally one day in a drunken stupor, he jumped out a third story window, landed on his head, got up, and took a cab to the hospital. If they'd had taller buildings in Boston he would have been killed. After that he pulled out of it, went to New York and eventually became a famous painter. Even now he walks around with a bent neck from that business. No one got out of that time unscathed. There wasn't much to that Cambridge apartment besides the desk and bed. Very ascetic. Between that and the dump across the street, which smelled to high heaven all the time of putrefaction or the rotten-egg smell of burning garbage—the real smell of Cambridge I always used to think—I wasn't set up to entertain. But it was there that I began to get visits from certain peculiar individuals, odd characters, who came without invitation and left, sometimes, before I would have liked them to leave. There was April Foxbite, who I knew from the Coast, for example, glowing, California vulgarian. There was Jack Gold, consummate square. I knew him through Josephine of all people, what did she see in him—the same thing I did? He had an old, oak, traditional, compartmented, pigeon-holed, roll-top desk, that at one time I thought I wanted more than any kind of desk that had ever stood on the face of the earth. One day I noticed

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a shiny black Cadillac pulling up outside. That in itself was a a major event across from the dump. There was a knock on the door. It was Ruby Geranium.

Eh Goombah.

A short thick figure, white fedora, dark glasses, heavy padded black kashmir overcoat, black double-breasted suit, white-on-white shirt, white silk tie with a portrait of an old woman in a black shawl painted on it.

You here? I said.

Just in from the Coast. A little business in the North End.

His knuckles were loaded with gold and silver, barbaric gems. He looked around, nodding, sneering.

So this is where you hole up. Who you hiding from?

I'm glad you like it.

You're not smart Ronnie. Looka this crap. He slapped his knuckles against a bridge table I used to eat on. It collapsed. Look at this look at this. He punched two left jabs at the plaster board wall. He left two hollow, cracked depressions.

Where'd you get this desk he said. He tipped it up with two fingers under a corner as if to see what it was made of. My notebook and pen went sliding onto the floor. Gee sorry he said. He let it drop with a bang.

I stole it I told him.

You don't say. You stole it. That's not nice Ronnie. You shouldn't do things like that. That's small time. You don't take risks for peanuts. That's bush league stuff. You're not smart. But you got the right instincts. Whata you get outa living on peanuts Ronnie? Come on, why you holed up? Who ya hiding from? He put his foot on my notebook strike he stepped on my notebook and pulled it toward him across the floor.

Take it easy with that I said.

Relax. I'm just tryin to set you straight Ronnie. Between pals, you know what I mean. "It was as though," he read slowly, "un-" what? What's that mean? What is this crap?

It's a story.

A story he exclaimed. What about, Mother Goose? You make me mad Ronnie. He took a step toward me. He clench-

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ed his fist to show me his rings. Don't waste my time. I come with a deal for you between pals and you tell me you're writing Mother Goose?

It's a story I said.

What story.

Suppose I put you in it. Then it would be about you.

Oh, about me. You're writing a story about me. That's nice. Why didn't you say so? I like that.

Yeah, good.

I'll tell you what he said. How about puttin my tie in it? He held out his tie. See that, that's a picture of my mother. Painted right on. Put that in the story.

Well I don't know if there's room in this story I said.

Whatyamean no room.

I'll put it in another one I said.

Okay that's better. Say who's that dame you got comin in and outa here all the time? The one who sometimes she comes at night and leaves in the morning.

That's Joan, a girlfriend.

I mean is she a nice girl? You know what I mean?

Yeah she's a nice girl.

I mean do you make her you know what I mean fuck you you know what I mean? A nice girl like that?

Come on, it's none of your business.

Like I'm just tryin to set you straight Ronnie you know what I mean? Between pals. You shouldn't do a thing like that to a nice girl like that Ronnie. You want dames I can get you all the dames you want. But I mean a nice girl you know what I mean? That's what I call moral turpentine. What are you some kinda beatnik?

What's the deal Ruby?

The deal is I wanna cut you in. I wanna put you on the main line. I wanna get you outa hiding. It's simple. You don't know how to do things Ronnie. I just show you how to do things. Anything you want. You wanna write, radio, TV, ads, you wanna work in college even, whatever it is. Don't worry about it we got friends all over. You're smart Ronnie. You'll become a big man in no time. I'll show you how to do

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it, it's all the same. You don't even have to do anything for us. We wouldn't be so crude. We just want you to be a big man. We have only your interests at heart. We just want you to be a big success.

And then?

And then we just come and see you sometimes. That's all. Like old friends. We just come and see you sometimes. In case we need a favor. You know what I mean?

I'll think about it.

Yeah. Think about it. No rush. Do your thing. We'll be waiting. You'll come around. Because there's no place else. And when you come, you'll come all the way. You know what I mean? It's like in my line. You can't afford to be yellow. You're either on top or on bottom, that's the way it works. And pretty soon you get tired of the bottom. Just tryin to set ya straight Ronnie. Between friends. Wise up. Know what I mean?

A few days after Ruby Geranium's visit, there was another unexpected knock at the door.

Who is it?

Police.

Who?

Open up. Police.

I opened the door and found a tall bulky figure in a brown fedora with the brim pulled down and an overcoat with the collar turned up so that I couldn't see his face.

All right Ronnie came a boozy baritone. Relax. Just routine.

Sergeant GunCannon. Is that you?

Looks like we finally caught up with you, hey Ronnie? He pushed past me into the room.

I ignored his remark. GunCannon always talked like that. How long you been in from the Coast? I asked him.

I got a little business in the North End he said. All right Ronnie, why'd you do it?

Come on Sergeant, I didn't do anything.

Yes you have Ronnie. Everyone's done something. You're no different from anybody else.

Well is there anything special you had in mind Sergeant?

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Just checking he said.

Same old Sergeant GunCannon I said. Put er there. He had both hands shoved deep into his overcoat pockets. He withdrew his right and thrust it at me. In it was a revolver, almost completely concealed by GunCannon's huge hand. That was the only thing that really scared me about Sergeant GunCannon. He had huge hands.

Ever seen this before Ronnie? He let the gun lie on its side in the palm of his hand. It had a pearl handle with a portrait of a woman in a black shawl.

Never saw it before Sergeant. What's up?

He dropped the gun back into his pocket. Nothing he said. Just a few routine questions.

What's going on GunCannon? Are you still working in the movies? Is this a movie?

You've heard of Interpol? he said.

Yeah.

He nodded.

Why are you hiding out in this crummy place he asked me sharply.

I'm not hiding I said.

He looked at me with narrow eyes. Come on, this is a hide-out, don't kid me. I know a hide-out when I see one.

I live here because I have no money Sergeant.

That's a way of hiding Ronnie. You could make some money if you wanted. Who you hiding from?

I'm just trying to stay by myself and mind my own business.

You can't do that Ronnie. You got to pay your debt to society. Every man owes a debt to society.

Not me Sergeant. Not this society.

You're a loafer Ronnie. You're a parasite on the face of society. You got a debt to pay and one way or another you're gonna pay it. It's on the books. Why don't you go out and get a job. You might as well make a buck for yourself while you're at it. It's compensation. No one likes to work Ronnie. None of us likes what they make us do to earn a living. You think I enjoy going around making it hot for guys like you? I like you Ronnie. You're a nice fella. Only some of the things

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that you're into are pretty disgusting. You been keeping women here. You can't expect to get away with something like that.

No I haven't Sergeant.

Yes you have. You been keeping women here, you've been making them undress and lie down on your bed, and you've been fucking them. All night.

Prove it.

He shoved his hand deep into his pocket and pulled out an old dried up used condom. Explain that he said.

It's not mine.

We got laboratory tests.

I deny it.

Then you been masturbating. You can't masturbate in Boston Ronnie. There's laws against it. That's a very serious offense. That's vice. We can always get you on a vice charge Ronnie. We can get anyone on a vice charge. Fucking and masturbating. I know people are corrupt Ronnie, but jesus, you really beat the band.

Look Sergeant all I'm trying to do is get away from it all and be by myself. I don't like what I see so I try to get away from it. That's why I'm poor that's why I live here. Okay?

Yeah it certainly is a ratty set-up, even for a graduate student. You know I been up to see the Dean, Ronnie. I took a look at your records. It seems like you don't even do your work very much. You're no graduate student you just wanna stay out of the army don't kid me. What's your draft board again, forty? Where'd you get that desk?

Somebody gave it to me.

You're guilty as hell Ronnie. On every count. I could book you right now. You can't fool an old cop like me. Vice, draft dodging, petty larceny, consorting with known criminals. Where's Ruby Geranium?

Whatyamean?

Don't play dumb, where is he? Come on Ronnie I'm getting tired of this. He took his huge hands out of his pockets and started cracking his knuckles.

I never heard of the guy I said.

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We know he came to see you. What did he want, where did he go?

I never saw him I never heard of him.

He flexed his knuckles, opening and closing his huge hands, then shoved them back into his pockets.

Okay Ronnie. We'll let it go for now. But I'll be seeing you. I'll be seeing you. No matter where you are, Interpol will be there too. And meantime let me give you a piece of advice between old friends. You got to make up your mind whose side you're on. It don't matter which, but you got to pick a side. Everybody got to play the game. Because if you don't, that's when you get into trouble. Bad trouble. Understand?

The desk gleamed dully under its gooseneck lamp, with a suggestion of depths, interiors, as one mused over it, elbows resting on its glossy black. The small room, the cheap furniture, the dump across the street, seemed muffled, muted, the desk absorbed everything into its blackness till there was nothing left outside, while within it gathered a potent concentration. The snow had been falling still fell strike the snow had been falling still falls. Outside, the fields, the road are a white blank, a mirror that turns you back to yourself. The brown veneer of the square, classical desk is so highly polished you can see your reflection in it. I open my escritoire and sit down as one might sit down at a harmonium. Under the lucent grey of the sky an invisible rain darkens the grey of the limestone building, the grey of the cobbled court. I look through the court, its arch, the arch, the court, the arch, beyond which an opacity of mist. Toward the gardens, the tapered needle, the boulevard, the monumental arch I know are there, but invisible. Harmony, order. There I walked each day through arches gardens courtyards to the Bibliothèque. It was like living in an abstraction, a theorem, an equation in which the unknown term was myself. Only I was haunted by fellow expatriates, phantasmal tourists, Americans who wouldn't leave me alone. Morris from the Bronx, bony sharp faced green complexion. He was here with Selma. His first trip to Europe, a belated honeymoon, and the first and as far as I could see the only thing that strikes him is the potential of the import-export business. He

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always had a valise full of things like Swiss watches German cameras Italian typewriters Spanish mantillas English pipes Ukranian babushkas Moroccan boxes Persian rugs Russian icons Greek antiquities Amsterdam diamonds French perfumes Havana cigars Chinese jade and spices from all the Asias. He was always trying to sell me something. It didn't matter that I had no money, or that I wouldn't buy anything if I had. He knew that. It was just a tic. He related to the world in terms of merchandise.

You got to buy a pair of these gloves Ronnie. You're crazy if you don't. You can't get real French gloves at a price like this. I'm selling below cost, a sacrifice. A bargain, a fire sale, everything must go. I'm selling out. Look at this watch, are you kidding? At a price like that you should buy two of them. You're crazy Ronnie, you have to buy something. You mean to tell me you come to Europe, an American, and you don't even buy anything? With a discount for dollars? No import taxes? Come on Ronnie, don't say no at least, say maybe. For Selma's sake. Let me show you some of this German merchandise. I gotta sell you something Ronnie.

Morris, you have to sell it but I don't have to buy it. Listen to what I'm telling you. If you don't buy anything you don't have to sell anything. That's one of the first things I figured out for myself.

Look Ronnie, you see this scarf. Pure silk. I'm not going to sell it to you. I'm gonna give it to you. Here, it's a present, take it.

I don't want it.

And all you have to do is buy this mantilla for your girlfriend. The mantilla I'm giving you at a loss.

Then there was Walter, who was a real expatriate, that is, he'd inherited money. There was something casual aimless disembodied wraith-like about Walter. He was always urging me to stay in Europe.

What do you want to go back for? There's no place for you in the States. You know that.

There's no place for me here either Walter.

Of course not. You wanted to escape, and this is an escape.

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You have to face that. And once you make up your mind to escape, there's nothing to do but keep escaping. You have to keep moving, that's the answer.

What's the question?

Walter would always stir up the worst ghost of all, my doppelganger from the States, myself as graduate student, penance and purgatory, a purgatory which meant nothing, since I didn't believe in paradise.

Eh goombah.

One day Ruby Geranium turned up at my door.

Just come up from Palermo he said. Thought I'd take a little vacation. He lumbered over to the escritoire and sat down in the red plush chair that went with it, sweeping aside my papers. He looked around the room.

So, what are ya, on the lam, uh.

I'm not on the lam Ruby.

Don't tell me you're not on the lam. What else you doing in Paris. He glared at me, chin thrust out. Then he laughed. Come on let's be straight Ronnie, it saves time. I know you're on the lam. I'm on the lam too. Why don't we team up?

What are you talking about?

How you doing for cash Ronnie. You don't have to tell me, not so good. He thrust his hand into his pants pocket and grunting, pulled out a huge naked roll of bills. He licked his thumb, pulled off the top one, and without looking at it tossed it on the escritoire. It was a hundred dollars. Live it up he said. It's gonna be a long time before you have enough money to get to Paris again, a guy like you.

What's that for? I asked him.

Doncha wanna travel a little while you're in Europe Ronnie? He picked up my notebook by a corner, dangled it in front of my face for a minute, and let it drop on the floor. You don wanna waste all your time on this crap do ya? Live it up a little.

Take it easy with that I said.

Ever been to Italy Ronnie. Ah it's a beautiful country. I just come back from there. You think Paris is good. I want you to get a look at places like Roma, Napoli, Palermo. Travel

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is educational. I wanna help support your travels. I want you to see my home town where I was born, Catania. I want you to take a nice, easy trip, down through Italy, and when you get to Catania, I want you to drop in and see my mama. I want you to tell her her boy is feelin good. And I want you to pick up one of her salamis for me. Nobody makes salami like mama. And when you get it I want you to take a plane back here to Paris with it before it spoils. As a favor between old friends. I pay expenses. And more. A lot more. For time lost from—he put his foot on my notebook—this crap.

Not interested Ruby.

Not interested. All right you're not interested. Maybe you be interested in one of our other businesses. What'd you think we are we're business men, just like anyone else. There's no law in business. When you can't do something with a lawyer you do it with a gun. That's free enterprise. And when you get what you want incorporate and contribute to charities. That's the way it works. You know Ronnie we're really on the same side of the fence. Outsiders. The underworld. Underdogs. Join the underground, get into some big money for once. You start making a good living, you find a nice girl, you get married, raise bambini, that's the way to do. Who's that big German dame you shack up with?

Who says I'm shacking up?

Kem on I know a shack-up when I see one. Pair a tits on her she's worth a lot a dough your Kraut chick, you know that? The Arabs got the hots for German dames. What a you care about another Nazi, it's a chance to get even. You slip a pill in her beer, next thing you know she wakes up in a harem in Yemen with her legs spread. Pair a tits on her. Come on Ronnie, we can work something out. What a you wanna go back to the States in that same old hole? Ain't you sick a that bush league stuff? You got money in your pocket, you want something, you buy it. You run your life the way you want. It just takes a little guts, that's all.

Voici le temps des assassins, I thought. I was sick of my incapacity. I thought of Sade Rimbaud Verlaine Lautréamont Jarry Cendrars Artaud Genet.

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What about that shack? There's no rush. Wait until you get tired of her.

She's just a kid I said.

Good. The younger the better. Kids are worth more. You think about it Ronnie. Pair a tits on her. We can work something out. And keep that bill. That's a present. Between old friends.

Ruby left. I sat down at my escritoire and looked out through the court. Harmony, order. The obelisk, stolen from Egypt, the Arc a monument to sheer power, the Etoile itself a grand plan to clear multiple trajectories for the emperor's canon in case the population should rise. That's order. Too bad about Irmenfrida. I was going to miss her. And besides it was a kind of ratty thing to do to a girl if you really thought about it. Still who knows some girls like that kind of stuff. It's exotic, there's a lot of adventure to it, it involves travel. Irmenfrida loved to travel, like all Germans she was a tourist at heart. And besides she didn't want to go home any more than I did and like me she knew she couldn't stay in Paris where we existed, as I said in a story at the time, like two abstractions whose intersection created their own reality. She had an incipient rape complex anyway, all women do. And she was a big girl she could take a lot of fucking. She'd probably get to like it. I could give her the right orientation, take her to see Rudolph Valentino in *The Sheik*, buy her a copy of *The Story of O*. In any case it would be a good way of terminating our relationship, which couldn't last forever after all. The final solution. For her. But what about me? It wasn't long before Sergeant GunCannon turned up.

Ronnie, this time you're really in trouble. We know every move Ruby makes. We know he's been here. He's walking around with a roll of marked bills. And the minute we catch up with one of those bills, Ruby is finished. We know you made a deal with him. I could pull you in right now on suspicion. A little routine questioning. He cracked his knuckles. But I'm not going to. Because I'm glad you made a deal with Geranium. And you know why I'm glad? Because now we got you where we want you. And you know where we want

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you? We want you to keep moving. We're gonna keep you moving from Palermo to Yemen to New York to the North End to El Paso, clear back to Old Glory, Arizona, all the way across the country to the Coast. Every city or little hick town where Ruby Geranium's got a contact to make, you're gonna make it, and then you're gonna move on. You're gonna play ball with Ruby Geranium, Ronnie. And every now and then I'm gonna pay you a little visit. Just like old friends. Have fun Ronnie. Be seeing you.

Paris was an abstraction, a theorem, an equation in which I was the unknown term. In the algebra of my fate it had nothing to do with Sergeant GunCannon or Ruby Geranium. It was exempt from my consciousness and that was why I liked it. The escritoire was Directoire. Paris was a museum, a playground. I was on the lam. Get your kicks. Keep moving. Outside it's twenty degrees. The night is black despite the snow on the ground. The limit of my vision by the light going through the window is the snow capped rocks of the low wall marking the nearer field. It looks like one of those New England walls from behind which minutemen fought. George Washington crosses the Delaware on the walls. It's amusing how the Colonial decor strike it's amusing how the decor of this Colonial house gives me an illusion of safety. The Sleeping Gypsy, my contribution, sleeps, or rots, the lion waits, and I wonder what happens when and if he wakes up. A remark someone made about me the other day: When you walk into a place—I was walking with him into a place—everybody turns and looks, so that I find myself deciding whose side I'm going to be on when the lynch mob comes. They know you don't play the game. What game? Now we go to my apartment on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, where I wound up in sixty, and that I still call home. Now this is where we get to the point, this is where the real story takes place. What story? I was sitting at my desk one day, my wife was out, my girlfriend strike my wife was out. The desk itself is interesting, two rounded curves sweeping out from the back and scooping in at front so you had the sense of the desk wrapping around you, enveloping you as you sat at it, very

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baroque, curved rows of drawers on either side with many intricate little fascinating compartments in them. And yet it wasn't a frivolous desk, but heavy, massive, solid, and with a surface of labyrinthine grained veneer that I had refinished myself. As I say I was sitting at my desk, the noise came up through the courtyard, clamored along Avenue B. The weather wasn't worth looking at or thinking about, smog followed by soot. But Ruby Geranium had been on my mind again. I thought I finally knew what to do about Ruby Geranium. So I developed the following dialogue with Sergeant GunCannon.

Sergeant, I want to make a deal with you about Ruby Geranium.

We don't make deals Ronnie. What is it?

The other day Ruby came around asking a lot of questions about you. He knows I know you, he knows you're after him. Now I'm sick of this, I want to get you both off my neck. I just want to be left alone. So here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to put you in touch with Ruby. I'm going to arrange a little meeting. I'm going to tell him that you're open to influence.

Now wait a minute Ronnie.

Don't worry Sergeant, I thought of everything. I go up to GunCannon talking quickly under my breath. You wait till he offers you a bribe, then you clap the cuffs on him. I'm the witness. Smart, huh?

Not so fast Ronnie. I gotta think about this.

Too late Sergeant. Ruby Geranium is waiting in the next room. I thought of everything. I open the door. Come on in Ruby. Much to my surprise, Ruby walks right up to GunCannon and shakes his hand.

Eh Goombah.

How's the boy Ruby. Hey says GunCannon, your friend here wants me to turn you in for trying to bribe an officer.

Ah forget this jerk says Ruby. He don't know how it works. He holds his five jewel loaded fingers in front of his chin and gestures at me. Hey, jerk, why doncha learn how it works? he says, grinning. Then he closes his fingers into a fist, and he

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stops grinning. GunCannon cracks his knuckles. Why don't we teach him how it works says Ruby. Let's play cops and robbers. I bribe you, you arrest me. He reaches into his pocket and grunting pulls out a huge roll of bills. He licks his thumb, counts off five, and looks up at GunCannon. GunCannon looks off into space. He doesn't see anything. All right a little extra today says Ruby. In honor of our friend the jerk. He counts off another three bills, pulls them off the roll, and folds them up. GunCannon doesn't see anything. He turns around and gazes out the window, but his huge hand is stuck out behind him, palm open. Ruby drops the folded bills into the hand. They disappear. All right says Ruby. Arrest me.

Arrest you says GunCannon. For what?

For trying to bribe an officer.

Ah come on Ruby. You can't bribe no officers. Officers are too honest to be bribed. You know that.

Ah gee come on Sergeant, arrest me.

Okay Geranium. You're under arrest.

You'll never get me alive says Ruby. He pulls his hand out of his pocket and shapes his thumb and forefinger into a gun. But GunCannon, too quick for him, already has his forefinger aimed and his thumb cocked. Bang bang you're dead says GunCannon.

Ya got me says Ruby. Hah hah hah he rumbled.

Hah hah hah echoes GunCannon. He laughed like a car trying to start on a cold morning.

How about that says Ruby. Don't that look like the real thing.

Sure it's the real thing says GunCannon. I know how it works. Don't forget, I used to be in the movies.

Okay I'm tired of this I said. I still have that marked bill you strike I still have that bill you gave me in Paris. That marked bill, remember Ruby? Geranium and GunCannon looked at one another. I told you I think of everything I said.

You're not going to sing says Geranium.

Come on Ronnie says GunCannon. Why ruin a good thing? We'll cut you in.

Sure says Geranium. We're all in the same boat.

We just follow orders says GunCannon.

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We just do what the big boys tell us says Geranium.

We take our money and keep quiet says GunCannon. Like anyone else.

Why do ya wanna go and spoil everything says Geranium.

They'll let us die says GunCannon. If you're not useful they let you die.

They'll kill us says Geranium. If you get in the way they kill ya.

Beat it I told them, just like that. Beat it. The story's over. The game is up.

GunCannon cracked his knuckles. Geranium held up his barbaric jeweled fist. We'll be back said GunCannon. And they disappeared.

The droplets rain from the eaves. The shadow of a cloud dims the snow dazzle. George Washington crosses the Delaware on the walls. I sit at my desk, making this up, and keep an eye on the road, waiting for a car to come cruising around the curve, a shiny black Cadillac, an anonymous four-door sedan. A gunshot echoes through the distance. They'll be back. Against that day prepare.

You sit at your desk, you look down at the slum. You begin to understand how it works. Or you drown in it.

People are on your side or they're not. You make contacts, compare notes. It helps you to breathe. Let's not suffocate in our own experience.

They'll be back, are already here, always with me. A gunshot echoes through the distance. The gypsy wakes, if he's still alive, faces the lion, and picks up his lute.

Start with immediate situation. One scene after another, disparate, opaque, absolutely concrete. Later, a fable, a gloss, begins to develop, abstractions appear. End with illuminating formulation. Simple, direct utterance.

A gunshot echoes through the distance.

They'll be back, are already here, always with us.

"The communication of our experience to others is the elemental act of civilization."

They're coming for you.

What's your story?

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Manuscript page from "The Professor's Wife"

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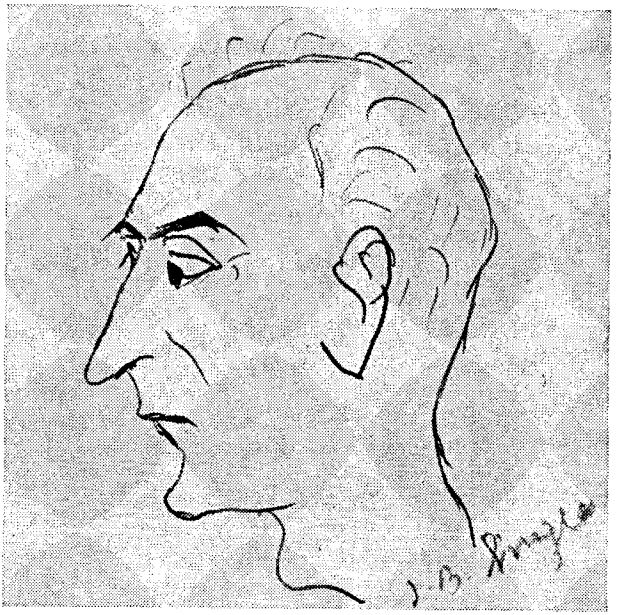
The Art of Fiction XLII

Isaac Bashevis Singer



Isaac Bashevis Singer lives with his second wife in a large, sunny five-room apartment in a huge upper-Broadway apartment house. Aside from hundreds of books and a large television set, it is furnished with the kind of pseudo-Victorian furniture typical of the comfortable homes of Brooklyn and The Bronx in the nineteen thirties. He has one offspring—a son from his first marriage—who is a high school teacher in Israel.

Singer works at a small, cluttered desk in the living room. He writes every day, but without special hours—in between interviews,

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visits, and phone calls. His name is still listed in the Manhattan telephone directory, and hardly a day goes by without receiving several calls from strangers who have read something he has written and want to talk to him about it. Until recently, he would invite for lunch, or at least coffee, anyone who called.

Singer writes his stories and novels in lined notebooks, in longhand, in Yiddish. Most of what he writes first appears in the Jewish Daily Forward, *America's largest Yiddish language daily, published in New York City. Getting translators to put his work into English has always been a major problem. He insists on working very closely with his translators, going over each word with them many times.*

The son and grandson of rabbis, Singer was born in Radzymin, Poland, in 1904. Although a student at the Rabbinical Seminary in Warsaw, he chose to become a journalist rather than a rabbi after the completion of his studies. In 1935 he came to the United States, and has worked since that time as a journalist for the Jewish Daily Forward.

His published novels in English include Satan in Goray, The Family Moskat, The Magician of Lublin, The Slave, In My Father's Court *and* The Manor. *His published collections of short stories in English include* Gimpel the Fool, The Spinoza of Market Street, *and* Short Friday.

Singer always wears dark suits, white shirts, and dark ties. His voice is high, but pleasant, and never raised. He is of medium height, thin, and perhaps being a strict vegetarian has something to do with his unnaturally pale complexion.

The first impression he gives is that of a fragile, weak man who would find it an effort to walk a block. Actually, he walks fifty to sixty blocks a day, a trip which invariably includes a stop to feed pigeons from a brown paper bag. He loves birds and has two pet parakeets who fly about his apartment uncaged.

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INTERVIEWER

Many writers when they start out have other writers they use as models.

SINGER

Well, my model was my brother, I. J. Singer, who wrote the *Brothers Askenazi*. I couldn't have had a better model than my brother. I saw him struggle with my parents and I saw how he began to write and how he slowly developed and began to publish. So naturally he was an influence. Not only this, but in the later years before I began to publish, my brother gave me a number of rules about writing which seem to me sacred. Not that these rules cannot be broken once in a while, but it's good to remember them. One of his rules was that while facts never become obsolete or stale, commentaries *always* do. When a writer tries to explain too much, to psychologize, he's already out of time when he begins. Imagine Homer explaining the deeds of his heroes according to the old Greek philosophy, or the psychology of his time. Why nobody would read Homer! Fortunately, Homer just gave us the images and the facts, and because of this the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are fresh in our time. And I think this is true about all writing. Once a writer tries to explain what the hero's motives are from a psychological point of view, he has already lost. This doesn't mean that I am against the psychological novel. There are some masters who have done it well. But I don't think it is a good thing for a writer, especially a young writer, to imitate them. Dostoevski, for example. If you can call him a writer of the psychological school; I'm not sure I do. He had his digressions and he tried to explain things in his own way, but even with him his basic power is in giving the facts.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of psychoanalysis and writing? Many writers have been psychoanalyzed and feel this has helped them to understand not only themselves but the characters they write about.

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SINGER

If the writer is psychoanalyzed in a doctor's office, that is his business. But if he tries to put the psychoanalysis into the writing, it's just terrible. The best example is the one who wrote *Point Counter Point*. What was his name?

INTERVIEWER

Aldous Huxley.

SINGER

Aldous Huxley. He tried to write a novel according to Freudian psychoanalysis. And I think he failed in a bad way. This particular novel is now so old and so stale that even in school it cannot be read anymore. So, I think that when a writer sits down and he psychoanalyzes, he's ruining his work.

INTERVIEWER

You once told me that the first piece of fiction you ever read was the *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

SINGER

Well, I read these things when I was a boy of ten or eleven, and to me they looked so sublime, so wonderful, that even today I don't dare to read Sherlock Holmes again because I am afraid that I may be disappointed.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think A. Conan Doyle influenced you in any way?

SINGER

Well, I don't think that the stories of Sherlock Holmes had any real influence on me. But I will say one thing—from my childhood I have always loved tension in a story. I liked that a story should be a story That there should be a beginning and an end and there should be some feeling what will happen at the end. And to this rule I keep today. I think that storytelling

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has become in this age almost a forgotten art. But I try my best not to suffer from this kind of amnesia. To me a story is still a story where the reader listens and wants to know what happens. If the reader knows everything from the very beginning, even if the description is good, I think the story is not a story.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think about the Nobel Prize for literature going to S. Y. Agnon and Nellie Sachs?

SINGER

About Nellie Sachs, I know nothing, but I know Agnon. Since I began to read. And I think he's a good writer. I wouldn't call him a genius, but where do you get so many geniuses nowadays? He's a solid writer of the old school, a school which loses a lot in translation. But as far as Hebrew is concerned, his style is just wonderful. Every work of his is associated with the Talmud and the Bible and the Midrash. Everything he writes has many levels, especially to those who know Hebrew. In translation, all of these other levels disappear and there is only the pure writing, but then that is also good.

INTERVIEWER

The prize committee said that they were giving the Nobel Prize to two Jewish writers who reflected the voice of Israel. That leads me to wonder how you would define a Jewish writer as opposed to a writer who happens to be Jewish?

SINGER

To me there are only Yiddish writers, Hebrew writers, English writers, Spanish writers. The whole idea of a Jewish writer, or a Catholic writer, is kind of far-fetched to me. But if you forced me to admit that there is such a thing as a Jewish writer I would say that he would have to be a man really immersed in Jewishness, who knows Hebrew, Yiddish, the Talmud, the Midrash, the Hassidic literature, the Cabbala, and so forth. And then if in addition he writes about Jews and Jewish life, perhaps then we can call him a Jewish writer,

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whatever language he writes in. Of course, we can also call him just a writer.

INTERVIEWER

You write in Yiddish which is a language very few people can read today. Your books have been translated into fifty-eight different languages, but you have said you are bothered by the fact that most of your readers, the vast majority of your readers, have to read you in translation, whether it's English or French. That very few writers can read you in Yiddish. Do you feel that a lot is lost in translation?

SINGER

The fact that I don't have as many readers in Yiddish as I would have liked to have bothers me. It's not good that a language is going downhill instead of up. I would like Yiddish to bloom and flower just as the Yiddishists say it *does* bloom and flower. But as far as translation is concerned, naturally every writer loses in translation, particularly poets and humorists. Also writers whose writing is tightly connected to folklore are heavy losers. In my own case, I think I am a heavy loser. But then lately I have assisted in the translating of my works, and knowing the problem, I take care that I don't lose too much. The problem is that it's very hard to find a perfect equivalent for an idiom in another language. But then it's also a fact that we all learned our literature through translation. Most people have studied the Bible only in translation, have read Homer in translation, and all the classics. Translation, although it does do damage to an author, it cannot kill him: if he's really good, he will come out even in translation. And I have seen it in my own case. Also translation helps me in a way. Because I go through my writings again and again while I edit the translation and work with the translator and while I am doing this I see all the defects of my writing. Translation has helped me avoid pitfalls which I might not have avoided if I had written the work in Yiddish and published it and not been forced because of the translation to read it again.

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INTERVIEWER

Is it true that for five years you stopped writing entirely because you felt there was nobody to write for?

SINGER

It is true that when I came to this country I stopped writing for a number of years. I don't know exactly if it was because I thought there were no readers. There were many readers. Coming from one country to another, immigrating, is a kind of a crisis. I had a feeling that my language was so lost. My images were not any more. Things—I saw thousands of objects for which I had no name in Yiddish in Poland. Take such a thing as the subway—we didn't have a subway in Poland. And we didn't have a name for it in Yiddish. Suddenly I had to do with a subway and with a shuttle train and a local and my feeling was that I lost my language and also my feeling about the things which surrounded me. Then, of course, there was the trouble of making a living and adjusting myself to the new surroundings... all of this worked so that for a number of years I couldn't write.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that Yiddish has any future at all or do you think that very soon it will be a dead language completely?

SINGER

It won't be a dead language because Yiddish is connected with five or six hundred years of Jewish history...of important Jewish history. And whoever will want to study this history will have to study Yiddish. In a joke I say that I have a special comfort for Yiddish and this is that now we are having as a world population only about 3.5 billion people, but 100 years from now we will have most probably 100 billion people, and everyone of them will need a topic for a Ph. D. Imagine how useful Yiddish will be for all these students looking for a topic. They will bring out everything that was connected with Yiddish and analyze it and write things about it, articles, and these things that you write for universities.

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Theses. So, I don't think it will be forgotten. Take such a language as Aramaic. It's already 2000 years that the Jews didn't use Aramaic and the language is still here. It has become now a part of Hebrew. Aramaic is used now in certificates and in divorce papers. Jews never forget really anything, especially a language which has created so much and has played such a part like Yiddish.

INTERVIEWER

When one thinks of contemporary writers writing in Yiddish one thinks immediately of you. But then it is hard to come up with any other names. Are there any other writers writing in Yiddish whom you consider highly?

SINGER

There is one writer whom I consider highly. Really he is a great writer. He's a poet. His name is A. Zeitlin. This man, he is my friend but I don't praise him because he's my friend. He's really a great poet. I consider his writing of the same value as the poetry of Thomas Hardy, and I have a high opinion of Thomas Hardy. The others...there are a number of other Yiddish writers...some of them are well-known, like Sholem Asch. There was David Bergenson. There was one very strong prose writer called A. M. Fuchs who is really a strong writer but he wrote always on the same topic. He had only one story to tell with a million variations. But I would say that there is something about Yiddish writing which is very effective and yet very old-fashioned—because the modern Yiddish writer does not write about real Jewish things, though it happens he is the product of enlightenment. He was brought up with the idea that one should get out of Jewishness and become universal. And because he tried so hard to become universal, he became very provincial. This is the tragedy. Not with the whole of Yiddish writings but with a lot of it. And thank God when I began to write I avoided this misfortune. Even though I was discouraged all the time. They told me why do you write about devils and imps. Why don't you write about the situation of the Jews, about Zionism,

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about Socialism, about the unions and about how the tailors must get a raise and so on and so on. But something in me refused to do this. They complained to me that I am obsolete. That I go back to the generations which have already vanished. That I'm almost a reactionary. But young writers are sometimes very stubborn. I refused to go their way and I was later glad that I had the character not to do what they wanted me to do. This type of writing has become so obsolete and so stale that it's not a question of getting translators in Yiddish, but really that we have very little to translate.

INTERVIEWER

When you say "this type of writing," you mean writing about unions and...

SINGER

About unions, about immigration, about progress, about anti-Semitism. This kind of journalistic writing in which one had the desire to create what they call a better world. To make the world better, to make the Jewish situation better. This kind of writing was very much in fashion in the twenties and I would say that the Yiddish writers never got out of it really.

INTERVIEWER

Don't you believe in a better world?

SINGER

I believe in a better world, but I don't think that a fiction writer who sits down to write a novel to make a better world can achieve anything. The better world will be done by many people, by the politicians, by the statesmen, by the sociologists. I don't know who is going to create it or if there will ever be a better world. One thing I am sure is that the novelists will not do it.

INTERVIEWER

The supernatural keeps cropping up in practically every-

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thing you write, particularly your short stories. Why this strong concern with the supernatural? Do you personally believe in the supernatural?

SINGER

Absolutely. The reason why it always comes up is because it is always on my mind. I don't know if I should call myself a mystic, but I feel always that we are surrounded by powers, by mysterious powers, which play a great part in everything we are doing. I would say that telepathy and clairvoyance play a part in every love story. Even in business. In everything human beings are doing. For thousands of years people used to wear woolen clothes and when they took them off at night they saw sparks. I wonder what these people thought thousands of years ago of these sparks they saw when they took off their woolen clothes? I am sure that they ignored them and the children asked them, "Mother what are these sparks?" And I am sure the mother said, "You imagine them!" People must have been afraid to talk about the sparks so they would not be suspected of being sorcerers and witches. Anyhow, they were ignored, and we know now that they were not hallucinations, that they were real and that what was behind these sparks was the same power which today drives our industry. And I say that we too in each generation see such sparks which we ignore just because they don't fit into our picture of science or knowledge. And I think that it is the writer's duty, and also pleasure and function, to bring out these sparks. To me, clairvoyance and telepathy and...and devils and imps... all of these things...

INTERVIEWER

Ghosts?

SINGER

Ghosts and all these things which people call today superstition are the very sparks which we are ignoring in our day.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think they will be able to be explained scientifically, just as sparks can be explained today as electricity?

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SINGER

I think the notion of science—what is scientific and what is not—will change in time. There are many facts which cannot be worked out in a laboratory, and still they are facts. You cannot show in a laboratory that there has ever been a Napoleon, you can't prove it as clearly as you can an electric current, but we know there *was* a Napoleon. What we call today ghosts and spirits and clairvoyance is also the sort of fact which you cannot just prepare and cannot make experiments with. But this doesn't mean that the fact is not true.

INTERVIEWER

How about the devil? In many of your writings the devil is the main character.

SINGER

Naturally, I use the devil and the imps as literary symbols. True, but the reason I use them as symbols is because I have a feeling for them. If I didn't have a feeling for these entities I would not use them. I still live with this idea that we are surrounded by all kinds of powers and I've been brought up with it and I still cling to it. Not that I try to, but they cling to me. If you extinguish the light at night and I am in a dark room, I am afraid. Just as I was when I was seven or eight years old. I have spoken to many rationalists who say how illogical that is, but when I ask them if they would consent to sleep a winter's night in a room with a corpse, they shiver. The fear of the supernatural is in everybody. And since we are all afraid of the supernatural, there is no reason why we shouldn't make use of it. Because if you are afraid of something, the very fact that you are afraid means that you have admitted that it exists. We aren't afraid of something which doesn't exist.

INTERVIEWER

You are the only Jewish writer who writes about the devil. Even Hebrew literature avoids the theme of the diabolical.

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SINGER

It is true that Yiddish and Hebrew literature are both under the influence of the Enlightenment. They are both in a way modern kinds of literature. Writers were brought up with the idea that they had been sunk in the Middle Ages long enough, and that since modern literature should be rational and logical, they should deal with the real world. To them, when I began to write, I seemed a most reactionary writer, a writer who went back to the dark ages. But, as I was saying, young writers are sometimes very stubborn. What is to you *dark* is to me *real*. They all condemned me for it. But today, since this kind of writing has a certain degree of success, they began somehow to make peace with it. Because you know how it is in this world: if something works it works. In fact, I didn't expect that anybody would be interested in my kind of writing. I was interested, and this was for me enough.

INTERVIEWER

Being as interested in ritual and superstition, incidentally, do you have any about yourself—in particular connected with your work and work habits?

SINGER

It is true that I believe in miracles, or, rather, grace from heaven. But I believe in miracles in every area of life *except* writing. Experience has shown me that there are no miracles in writing. The only thing that produces good writing is hard work. It's impossible to write a good story by carrying a rabbit's foot in your pocket.

INTERVIEWER

How do you come to write a story? Do you observe all the time, like a reporter? Do you take notes?

SINGER

I never go out to look for a story. I take notes, but never like a reporter. My stories are all based upon things that have come to me in life without my going out to look for them. The only notes I take are notes on an idea for a story. But it

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must be a story with a climax. I am not a slice-of-life writer. When such an idea comes to me, I put it down in a little notebook I always carry around. Finally the story demands to be written, and then I write it.

INTERVIEWER

In addition to writing stories and novels, you spent many years of your life in journalism. You still work as a journalist for *The Forward.*

SINGER

Yes. I am a journalist. Every week I write two or three journalistic articles. Journalism in Yiddish is quite different from journalism in other languages, especially in English. In America, a journalist is a man who either deals completely with facts, or he is a commentator of the political situation. In a Yiddish newspaper, even if it's a daily, it's actually a daily *magazine.* I can write articles in *The Forward* about life making sense or not, or that you shouldn't commit suicide, or a treatise on imps or devils being in everything. Our readers are accustomed to get the news mostly from the radio and television or from the English newspaper which comes out in the evening. When he buys the newspaper in the morning, he is not after the news; he wants to read articles. So if I am a journalist, I am not exactly the same kind of journalist who works for let's say *The New York Times.*

INTERVIEWER

Do you think working as a journalist for such a paper as *The Times* a good background for somebody who wants to write novels and stories?

SINGER

I think that any information a human being gets, especially a writer, is good for him. I don't think that being a journalist can do any damage to a writer.

INTERVIEWER

Do you know any other writers?

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SINGER

Very few, because here in America I find there is no place to meet them. When I lived in Poland, I used to hang out at the writers' club. I'd be there every day. But there is nothing quite like that in America. I know practically no other writers. Once in a while I meet some writers at a cocktail party, and I like them: they are very fine people. But somehow it never goes beyond a superficial meeting. I am sorry about this. I would like to be friendly with more writers.

INTERVIEWER

Many contemporary writers are affiliated with the universities. What do you think of teaching as a way of making a living while writing?

SINGER

I think that journalism is a healthier occupation for a writer than teaching, especially if he teaches literature. By teaching literature, the writer gets accustomed to analyze literature all the time. One man, a critic, said to me, "I could never write anything because the moment I write the first line I am already writing an essay about it. I am already criticizing my own writing."

It's not good when the writer is both a critic and a writer. It doesn't matter if he writes a review once in a while or even an essay about criticism. But if this kind of analyzing goes on all the time and it becomes his daily bread, it may one day become a part of his writing: it is very bad when the writer is half-writer and half-critic. He writes essays about his heroes instead of telling a story.

INTERVIEWER

Could you tell me something about the way you work. Do you work every day, seven days a week?

SINGER

Well, when I get up in the morning, I always have the desire to sit down to write. And most of the days I *do* write something. But then I get telephone calls and sometimes I have to

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write an article for *The Forward*. And once in a while I have to write a review, and I am interviewed, and I am all the time interrupted. Somehow I manage to keep on writing. I don't have to run away. Some writers say that they can only write if they go to a far island. They would go to the moon to write not to be disturbed. I think that being disturbed is a part of human life and sometimes it's useful to be disturbed because you interrupt your writing and while you rest, while you are busy with something else, your perspective changes or the horizon widens. All I can say about myself is that I have never really written in peace, as some writers say that they have. But whatever I had to say I kept on saying no matter what the disturbances were.

INTERVIEWER

What do you consider the most difficult aspect of writing?

SINGER

Story construction. This is the most difficult part for me. How to construct the story so that it will be interesting. Easiest for me is the actual writing. Once I have the construction set, the writing itself—the description and dialogue—simply flows along.

INTERVIEWER

The hero of most Western writing is the Superman, the Prometheus character. The hero of Yiddish fiction, Jewish writing, seems to be the little man. He's a poor but proud man always struggling. And your own classic example of the little man would be Gimpel the Fool. How do you account for the fact that in so much of Yiddish fiction the hero is the little man?

SINGER

Well, the Yiddish writer was really not brought up with the idea of heroes. I mean there were very few heroes in the Jewish ghettos—very few knights and counts and people who fought duels and so on. In my own case, I don't think I write

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in the tradition of the Yiddish writers' "little man," because their little man is actually a *victim*—a man who is a victim of anti-Semitism, the economic situation, and so on. My characters, though they are not big men in the sense that they play a big part in the world, still they are not little, because in their own fashion they are men of character, men of thinking, men of great suffering. It is true that Gimpel the Fool is a little man but he's not the same kind of little man as Sholem Aleichem's Tevye. Tevye is a little man with little desires, and with little prejudice. All he needed was to make a living. If Tevye could have made a living, he wouldn't have been driven out of his village. If he could have married off his daughters he would have been a happy man. In my case, most of my heroes could not be satisfied with just a few rubles or with the permission to live in Russia or somewhere else. Their tragedies are different. Gimpel was not a little man. He was a fool, but he wasn't little. The tradition of the little man is something which I avoided in my writing.

INTERVIEWER

If most of your writing deals with a people without power, without land, without statehood, political organization or even a choice of occupation, and yet who have a great moral response and an intensity of faith, are you in effect suggesting that the Jews were better off when they were restricted and discriminated against?

SINGER

I think there is no question that power is a great temptation and those who have power will sooner or later stumble into injustice. It was the good fortune of the Jewish people that for 2000 years they didn't have any power. The little bit of power that they did have they have certainly misused like anyone else who has power. But we were blessed for almost 2000 years with a complete lack of power, so because of this our sins were never as great as those who really had power over the life and death of other people. But I bring this up not to preach. I never really knew people who had a lot of power.

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Except when I describe Poles or when I describe once in a while a rich man whose power was in his money. But even so, these people were not really rich enough to wield much power.

INTERVIEWER

I can't help but get the feeling from your writing that you have grave doubts about the sufficiency of knowledge or even wisdom.

SINGER

Well, in a way it is true. Yiddish writing was all built on the ideas of the Enlightenment. Enlightenment, no matter how far it will go, will not bring the redemption. I never believed that Socialism or any other *ism* is going to redeem humanity and create what they call the "new man." I have had many discussions with writers about this. When I was young, when I began to write, people really believed that once the means of production belonged to the government, the "new man" would result. I was clever enough or maybe foolish enough and skeptical enough to know that was a lot of nonsense; no matter who owns the railroads or the factories, men will remain the same.

INTERVIEWER

Is there anything you think will save humanity?

SINGER

Nothing will save us. We will make a lot of progress, but we will keep on suffering, and there will never be an end to it. We will always invent new sources of pain. The idea that man is going to be saved is a completely religious idea and even the religious leaders never suggest that we will be saved on this earth. They believe that the soul is going to be saved in another world, that if we behave here well, there is a hope that our soul will go to paradise. The idea of creating a paradise here on this earth is not Jewish and certainly not Christian, but a completely Greek or pagan idea. As the Jews say, from a

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pig's tail, you cannot make a silk purse. You cannot take life and suddenly turn it into one great delight, one ocean of pleasure. I never believed in it and whenever people speak about a better world, while I admit that conditions can be made better and I hope that we can do away with wars, still there will be enough sickness and enough tragedy so that humanity will keep on suffering more or less in the same way as it always has. Being a pessimist to me means to be a realist.

I feel that in spite of all our sufferings, in spite of the fact that life will never bring the paradise we want it to bring, there is something to live for. The greatest gift which humanity has received is free choice. It is true that we are limited in our use of free choice. But the little free choice we have is such a great gift and is potentially worth so much that for this itself life is worthwhile living. While I am in one way a fatalist, I also know that what we have reached up until now is largely because of free will, not because conditions have changed, as the Marxists believe.

INTERVIEWER

Many readers look upon you as a master storyteller. Others feel that you have a far more significant purpose in your writing than merely to tell stories.

SINGER

Well, I think that to write a story *well* is the duty of a storyteller. To try with all his might that a story should come out right. What I call right is that the construction should be right, the description right, that there should be equilibrium between form and content and so on. But this is not everything. In each story, I try to say something, and what I try to say is more or less connected with my ideas that this world and this kind of life is not everything, that there is a soul and there is a God and there may be life after death. I always come back to these religious truths although I am not religious in the sense of dogma. I don't keep to all the rules of organized religion. But the basic truths of religion are near to me and I always contemplate them. I would consider myself more of a

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Jewish writer than most of the Yiddish writers because I am more a believer in the Jewish truths than they. Most of them believe in progress. Progress has become their idol. They believe that people will progress to such a degree that the Jews will be treated well, they will be able to assimilate, mix with the Gentiles, get good jobs, and perhaps be President one day. To me all these hopes are very little and very obsolete and very petty. I feel that our real great hope lies in the soul and not in the body. In this way I consider myself a religious writer.

INTERVIEWER

Sometimes reading you I think of certain Far Eastern philosophers, such as the Indian philosopher Krishnamurti. Were you at all influenced by Buddhist or Hindu writings?

SINGER

I read these writers too late to have been really influenced by them. But when I read them in my later years, a short time ago, I said to myself I have thought these same thoughts without having read them. When I read the Bhagavad-Gita it looked to me so very near, and I almost wondered if I had read this in a former life. This is true also about the sayings of Buddha and other Far Eastern writings. The so-called eternal truths are really eternal. They are in our blood and in our very essence.

INTERVIEWER

Some commentators on the current scene, notably Marshall McLuhan, feel that literature as we have known it for hundreds of years is an anachronism, that it's on the way out. The reading of stories and novels, they feel, is soon to be a thing of the past, because of electronic entertainments, radio, television, film, stereophonic records, magnetic tapes, and other mechanical means of communication yet to be invented. Do you believe this to be true?

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SINGER

It will be true if our writers will not be good writers. But if we have people with the power to tell a story there will always be readers. I don't think that human nature is going to change to such a degree that people will stop being interested in a work of imagination. Certainly, the true facts, the real facts, are always interesting. Today non-fiction plays a very big part...to hear stories about what happened. If people get to the moon, journalists will tell us, or films will tell us, what happened there, and these will be more interesting stories than anything a fiction writer can produce. But still there will be a place for the good fiction writer. There is no machine and no kind of reporting and no kind of film that can do what a Tolstoy or a Dostoevski or Gogol did. It is true that poetry has suffered a great blow in our times. But not because of television or because of other things, but because poetry itself became bad. If we are going to have numbers of bad novels, and bad novelists imitate each other, what they write will neither be interesting nor understood. Naturally this may kill the novel, at least for a time. But I don't think that literature, good literature, has anything to fear from technology. The very opposite. The more technology, the more people will be interested in what the human mind can produce *without* the help of electronics.

INTERVIEWER

So you would encourage young people today to think of serious writing as a way of life?

SINGER

When it comes to business, to the finances of writing, I really don't know. It may be that a time will come when the novelist will get such small royalties that he will not be able to make a living. I just cannot tell you about this. But, if a young man would come to me and I can see that he has talent and he asks me if he should write, I would say go on and write and don't be afraid of any inventions and of any kind of progress. Progress can never kill literature, anymore than it can kill religion.

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INTERVIEWER

It's hard to keep from noticing that among the most widely read and respected authors in the United States today there is a large percentage of Jewish authors—yourself, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Henry Roth, Bernard Malamud. Even non-Jewish writers are writing on Jewish themes and producing best sellers, as, for example, James Michener with his novel *The Source*. How do you account for the post-World War II popularity of Jewish writers and Jewish themes?

SINGER

I think that for many centuries the Jew was completely ignored in literature. They wrote about the Jew always in the way of a cliché. Either the Jew was a usurer, a bad man, a Shylock, or he was a poor man, a victim of anti-Semitism. In other words, they either scolded him or they pitied him. And because of this the Jew's way of life, his way of love, was a secret to humanity. It's only a short time ago that Jewish writers began to write about Jews the same way as Americans write about Americans and English writers about Englishmen. They tell everything about them, the good and the evil. They don't try to apologize for them. They don't try to scold them. And I would say that since there was a lot of curiosity about Jewish life, I am not astonished that Jewish literature is now in vogue. This doesn't mean that it is always going to be so. I believe that sooner or later things will even out. How many Jews are good writers or bad writers I don't know. I don't think that we are producing as many good writers as people think. We have a lot of able, gifted writers, and able people, but I see as few great writers among us as there are few great writers among other people! There are a very few great writers anywhere.

—HAROLD FLENDER

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John Thorpe

Bolinas, I was near there once, but that was years ago

I was given the Earth

But I didnt want it

I thought myself apart: proportion
Land arrow 2/16

And now I am lost

a line in my ears like the surf
Post
Post
Post

out back
the weather fence
yellow straw

Though a man want to cut himself
off, even lighting a smoke brings
back
I have never known why
I got up!

I have never confronted that cry for
as I came across the front yard,
when last I saw you children
there was your oakie dog
I stopped at,
much too land arrow...
Tell you about it after this chorus
cause I was just leaving
I have to leave
I feel like walking
kids, I was just leaving

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to walk to the end of Wharf Rd
and on down the beach
in,
Bolinas,
inland
indeed
imposed—
impasse
I don't even know
have I been picking berries
clams
on the minus tide flats
night or bogs, my
shoes
are split & black, or
home
these weeks? Did I sign up
fishing
Tiburon
the nights are colder than
all I ate
was spaghetti yesterday
in town, that was mindless
nothing before I remember
the parmacet
whale
on the beach 50
foots
without front or back &
which had been largely eaten
up before it was there.

2

If anyone says I live in a town
The sea is my order
I know sheet water

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& when so, its been
coast. I am no damn
good for *depth*
(like *bowels*
rightly beyond that
dip at the end of the
beach before I stand
deep
waves come
up to be pulled over very quickly very
cold, in, dense, I go back.
No need to go to the end of the road
to find the curb painted yellow and red
drink rum and park the car where it drops down
at a house decorated with keyhole saw
posts
kindling pickets ridiculous shadows of
things to be left alone.
Walk back to the car.
What can I get at your house
with a chained down gate.
Nobody comes out. Pockets are of course
warmer. If you turn on the faucet
and nothing comes out
that form is elicited
from you: Bottom
wall
drain holes.
Primer
used on a rough surface
before you spread on
the real thing which here was
a New England church shows
off pristine
systematically clean
and those other words that reflect
light street light and no
etymology Louis

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Mayer's office suite
crossroads cosmetic
as klieg lights for
New Salem the surface
on railings white
before brownstones
calcined instant—
Nothing to
stop for the speed of a trial
or future touch to it, fend
serve this coping
outrider and
fringe, to draw the material
to go farther, whereby it is
as ever
rooms what with sureness
that things lie.

How I arrived at white chimneys in the full moon.
I don't know. The story is
that
I
got
it
from behind
towed, and
subside.

across terra, inside the shirt
of the carrier
as Fremont was proud
of having found
a shorter road
to Oregon
to his wife in a letter, of something to do with
cars on the street, a couple of wars, with
being on foot, blinking & nodding, light
rain, 10 at

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night, rather than facing the people.
figure, man
I
that write con-
front to the end that
the road out is
a beach, then
that beach
conducts again *ab*
agia, ara, Ae

I speak say sea claim
calmer than intelligence,
a constant seepage, lips of water
at base of the logs of the shelf you shored
up. Then
what
does the tide go out of? Questions
the child
the town of her
splashes and their backwash
stand out on
main drags, streetlamps and fog.

3

There is a rod
with a metal rectangle
under her arm
if I call me she
when I am
petty elbow
under basket
sways
light on it
off
toward the Reef
in the wind

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I'll try to dispose of
is it history
people tried to throw away
as my cigarette thrown, I
rise.

and her pockets
creased
her clothing
offset
by the Fault line creeks followed garbage in it down
to Town, invisible ship-able
wakes
her fingers, touch as the
highway east to the trident of junk
from the bay
swept
along the coast
dispense her lower
norther
pants pulled up
shirt
waist
inches of white to
ankles—anchor

her far end Stinson spit
the waters of Bolinas
flow on the tides like a river
keeping
the channel open
for what?
That
question's wrong. It
doesn't dam. It
inlets
Dispense it
lower
under mountains

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a little white triangle
house.

4

I keep destroying Bolinas I
only to see
the ridge rise
sides that won't hold
human but
mark found.

No
end
but turns into sorts of observance
as the big stone which sits over the road end
Rock mark
sending it all back
A man
in me all women wanted and lights search for
forced back
I fear
might glow
with the ancient light of a man
with SOMETHING AROUND HIM m o o n
exchanging its flashes for
s h e e n
in my lashes as I look
up firm
sending it all back
and in that strange memorial light
reflect the lonely yankees to the blue
stars

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Now logs are propped against the road
whose name I don't know.
For all I know
the bridge is
broken forever.
I don't think the specific separates,
other than fog in the headlights, as rocks
their own season settle grey with sun behind
them. West and East are too far out. We are
too.
Even so,
in a darker corner of time, once it is
warm, and we have the night
to evanesce in domes of spray as people
might when their fear is over, we
shall.
Would that the hills were draped
to make us do this.
Would that the kites
were minds and the egrets had us forever.

This poem's moving backwards
Calypso.
Homer
in the sense of
the run home. There is
vallied
wind
for that.
We thought
to go home at the end of it.
But it passed from us with nothing to do.
Avasa Hafa Abbey Sea
Around this rock
the wind is lost.

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6

off the top, the instant
off the top of my head whatever
makes the ship
worth land
a commons at
bay—Bolinas
durable Afl hal-yard
more than a prefix
Havn Ahva Ap-flod off
Aia Chertsey rise up
Confront
that beach arduous loft
Cliff
up
Hal har hard hel that house hill
that I home

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David Shapiro

Master Canterel at Locus Solus

I

And nothing was missing
Introduced into the brain
The family is now watching
The scene that's produced

The scene that's produced
Might be several different scenes
Once the muscles are loosed
With vitalium and resurrectine

With vitalium and resurrectine
They dress as they need to
Outside the cooling machine
Inside the grieving family

Inside the grieving family
Covered with heavy sweaters
And the wig they wear is heavy
Then they leave the ice-box

Then they leave the ice-box
And the laboratory technician
Takes a key and locks
After the end of the cycle

After the end of the cycle
There is no putrefaction
But that invariable cycle
Of the animated corpse

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Of the animated corpse
He must document everything
He identifies the corpse
And he surrounds the corpse

And he surrounds the corpse
Puts walls where it falls
Puts stairs and chairs
Using originals if possible

Using originals if possible
He repeats indefinitely
The same scene in his skull
Chosen once forever

Chosen once forever
His eyes, working lungs, words
Actions, walk, as ever
And nothing is missing

II

For perfection in prognostics
I imagined an apparatus
That the sun and wind would fix
The sun and wind combined

The currents of the atmosphere
But how they could give birth
To an art work was not clear
Only a fine mosaic would do

I searched for a material
That would engage the sun
And disengage my own will
And used multicolored teeth

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Which I had learned to attract
As you attract the breath
Attract rather than extract
Like wind to a balloon

Almost bloody roots
Immense molars and monstrous canines
And a milk tooth that shoots
An imperceptible light

A brusque and powerful magnet
That the world obeys
And the sick tooth drawn to it
Leaves the mouth without torture

Thus the toothaches stop
And the inferior maxillary
And tooth filling drop
Down the unwooded esplanade

At times bleeding, then brilliant
From the roots and cavities
I have furnished a monument
Where I found myself

Beyond this region of teeth
There is a single red root
The dove made of white teeth
Graciously flies to it

Mornings the mirror turns east
Dawn it contemplates the south
Nights the mirror shines west
And directly receives the sun

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Elegy to Sports

Orestes pointed out what was despotic
In youth and stingy hunger.
From his golden injuries he got
What he wanted from you.

The key used to dial was at last in place,
The house asbestos.
And he dressed up as a piece of human candy
With great hustling.

Last stop! Your clothes fill up the trunk
With a pitiful hand.
The seer in old age follows the raindrops,
Touring an inhuman scene.

The Swiss have no wars, though they lose combats,
The English are hemmed in by waves,
Those who drink the rivers Po, Tagus, and Danube,
Are found on the river bottom.

And so the vaulter, who rebounds into gravel
Dragging his pole behind,
Like gasoline sets the hurdles on fire
Jumping and jumping again.

The pianist whistles during the accompaniment;
Mrs. closes her eyes;
She retires from us, seeing you dislike her
And her rowboat collection.

Now you are happy, and you are more than happy,
You swan of Lancaster.
Don't complain about the dull apartment life
A thousand times a day.

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A gnome brought suit against the cedarwood,
And Libya owes money to a tree.
Your father has received the gems amber and garnet
For a year's work on his bed.

You beat your hand, you jump out of line,
And you say among yourselves:
"This is what Italy and Greece dumped on us
In a thousand poems."

So you give away your violin, the other his trumpet;
The girl gives you away.
And the women, the pedestrians, and the detective
Desert the champ.

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The Retreat

Joy Williams

Every morning when she woke up, she saw the flame and felt the fire—curling around her lashes, creeping up her thighs, blossoming flowers of pink upon her flesh. Clutching stiff lace against her dangling breasts, pressing her heels into the bedpost, she would scream, her singed cheek wrinkling into itself. The bed was vast, her legs tangled in the warm sheets, her mouth was pressed against the salty hairs of her husband's, the lawyer's, chest. When he was not there to comfort her, she spiraled out of the nightmare with baffled will, and panting, burned flesh quivering, opened her eyes to the three children who were left crowded in the doorway. The small naked girl leisurely winding her fingers inside herself, the two boys moist with the morning heat, their heads yellow and thick as the swatch of brooms. None as pretty as the first having come from an imperfect body, all pushed early and sickly from her seared loins.

She twisted away, raised a hand to her face. "Where's your father? Cook some toast. Play Monopoly." Her skin was damp and felt brittle as bark. She wanted damp clothes, to be shrouded in wet. She wanted to float in cool water for the rest of her life, give birth to her babies, like the dolphin, under the sea. "Leave me alone," she said. They left softly, without judgment, like little animals.

The house had vanished without a trace into the charred soil. Only the plumbing rose obscenely toward the moon while the rooms thudded down with a roar like a trumpet and brought down with them, somewhere, though he was never found, the baby, called Adam for the first, turning in his crib, a wraith wise beyond belief, his face white and serene

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before the gay flame, giving no cry, providing no landmark for the woman who searched and stumbled, thrusting out excruciated fingers, stiff as the prongs of forks, guided only by a blazing cotton duckling illuminating her futility—its button eye deathless....All beneath the cataclysmic moon, the ashes tumbling still burning, checkered like an armadillo, her own skin strangely cool, painfully cool and distant from her, the nails peeling from her fingers, the cuticles hissing as she flicked out hands seeking the lost child in the gone crib.

The next morning was usual except for the ash found on cars parked three miles away. It had been a fierce wind that beheaded the flowers in the garden swimming in the curl of hoses, crushed by the waffle-grid of the town's huge machines. The stalks rose like tubes in a black sea. The tendrils rigged like reins upon the ground, like the reins the delicate tubing that brought food to her as she lay shedding her skin, tough maroon like bloody wood shavings, tough violet like the so many dead petals of a rose. They had later left the town with no belongings. The drop beneath the wing-tip where she raised her coated hand against the glare showed only acres of russet and the broad roofs of buildings blue in the sun. The quarter acre she sought and feared she could not find. To a bird falling through the clouds it could have been a deep dark lake.

She turned to the window, pressed her lips against the screen, tasting oil. The car was backing out on the graveled drive. She could see inside, the tanned hand upon the wheel, the sharkskin shank. "Sag," she cried. She knew she was no longer on fire but she wanted him anyway—purveyor, endurer, sire of the formless children waiting in her womb. "Sag!"

The car stopped and he got out.

"They're new friends," he said. "Come along." Sag Cashe, a big man, unmarred, his identifying marks a strawberry couched in the web of his thumb, a mole rocking beneath his left testis. "Known only to you, Kit," he would always say, weighing them in his palm like meat. "Only to you and my poor momma. Bless her in the ground." She shrugged.

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He rooted at her breasts—shy, the wasted odor of stones—and she pulled away leaving him with his eyes closed, his mouth browsing air. He raised his large hopeless hands and carefully rolled a cigarette, a Southerner with morose and baseless memories of the land. Blue banal Bugler with a tear in his side. Tapping and shaping, a dainty swat of the tongue on the paper square and he inhaled deeply, leaving a broad ash, foul tasting crumbs upon his lips.

"It's going to rain," she said. "I read it in the paper. I plan to put the plants out on the porch."

At night she bathed the children, dipping into their waxy ears, curving solemn as seashells into their brains where the prayers were heard. Kneeling with them by their beds, their clothes hanging glandular with great presence from hooks, she chanted with them, pressing against their flanneled sides, delighting in the fragile ribs that she had made, bones from her blood. Through the open window she saw Baily's beads around the moon though there had been no eclipse, no sun sifting through lunar mountains and prayed for rain, a plashy squall, so that she could spend the day inside. There was no ring, though, no mist around the moon, the flecks she saw were on her own grey pupil and in dreams they sunk to the drops on the cheek of the child returned from the lake on a board, unknown white wet child with wavering face borne to a home that she, Kit Cashe, of the strange nursery lilt name, was uncertain was not her own. Jogging through the water, her sneakers sucking up ooze, small crustaceans, festering needles of pine, splinters of sunk rafts, clotted fur swept from doorways, steering through the weight of water, leaving no wake, each step plummeting heavily, hesitating before it fell in a tangle of waving weeds. The child was being carried over the land now, she could hear the water splash from his clothing onto the leaves, and yet still she slogged through the water, trying to reach him, trying to see his face while beside her four ducks paddled, their orange feet deceiving, fractionalized, while below the ducks were the sleeping eggs of fishes and below the eggs the foamy creeks of hell...

She woke screaming to a bright and cloudless dawn.

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The boat was dappled and nameless, blue paint curling to expose a grey primer. Sitting on the dock, her arms around the rotting canvas of a piling, Kit Cashe drew it close with her foot hooked over the side. Holding the rolled canvas warm worn from the sun, she lowered herself heavily to the deck, coarse threads sticking to her fingers, her eyes shifting to the stained well where the huge black motor lay slung forward, greasy to the touch, where the scales of fish, wrappers from sweets had hardened to the sides.

She raised her arms to receive the shrimp tossing in the bait bucket from Johnny Rick. His wife, very young with a streak in her hair, wearing one of Johnny's T-shirts and holding a gun in a water-repellent case, jostled against her. The boat had no markings. Where the license should have been posted, a yellow graduation tassel dangled. Grim roe—torn by the wind, its braid musty, the flavor of warm pints of milk, bubbling ring of water, the bust beneath the flag, taste of the gymnasium as the tongue slides along the floor.

"Honors," the boy said. "Usually, of course, they're black."

He was a newspaperman, a pockmark in his forehead like a third Cyclopian eye, his mouth sly wide deference. JEALOUSY OF HUSBAND FORCES WOMAN AND GORILLA TO FLEE TO FLORIDA MOLLIE BONITA WED IN SOPCHOPPY HIGH ON GRASS SLAY THREE his mind flagrant and italic from writing heads, his fingers blunted from plastic-webbed keys, tall with a nodding sunflower head, a cast of dacron and Juicy Fruit....He smells so young, she thought, and she saw them moving through the days, Johnny Rick and his small watchful wife and the hundreds more, vague and insistent and puzzled like turtles in a kraal.

"We all goin' have a good time," the girl said. "That Foster is a scream. He's a dirty ol' man." She opened her mouth wide without laughing, then coughed and tugged down the stained edges of her brief bathing suit, slipping the brassy curls curving back under orange elastic.

A pelican stood on a piling, its wings cocked, moodily drying its feathers. Stern and goiterish. Toulouse-Lautrec. The bird rose enormously as Sag ran down the dock, holding a

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cake of ice against his chest, his red shirt turning black. "No tongs," he shouted and threw it into a styrafoam chest. The needlefish thrashed in the freezing melt and Kit saw one break apart, neat and bloodless like a split peach. They packed beer and more bait around the ice and stowed it in the small cabin. Other boxes were full of food—beans, bacon, grits, a dozen cans of fruit, six quarts of gin, a long soft box of Fig Newtons.

"Foster's a savage," the boy smiled. "Drinks his gin warm and neat and only when we bring it. Gets full as an egg."

They had traveled for miles by car to the tacky fishing town from which they would travel miles by boat. She sat dressed in tidy white shorts and blouse and felt the heat slip down her sides. Up on the land by the only motel, two boys on bicycles rode around and around, playing cards clattering in their wheel spokes. She slapped lightly at a mosquito and it fell, leaving a droplet of blood on the pocket of her blouse.

"Must have gotten you already, shuga," Sag called.

"I believe I'll go up to that restaurant there and get an iced tea." She saw the faces pushing out from behind the RC decal. The townspeople stayed there all day and into the night, round and loveless in bulbous blue denim, stirring coffee, bouncing new babies upon their knees. The houses would wait half-built, unattended with latches for locks, putty bunching up between the tiles, the aloe plant growing within quick reach.

"Where is the rest room?" She had asked discreetly, but no one had heard. "When Donna hit," the cook had said, "the water come up high as that stool you're leaning on, come up high as the sequined girls on the pinball machine. When Donna hit, took Foster's privy and salted it up on Coon Key." He opened himself a Coca-Cola. "He tried to bring it back by boat but it was up too high in the mangroves."

Kit did not want to go back there again. They would think she was crazy. "Don't be silly," Johnny said, "I have a drink right here that'll cool you off," and he handed her a paper cup of gin and ice, a floating chunk of bright green lime. Then they were backing out of the slip and pouring full throttle through the islands and she was instantly lost, all the keys be-

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ing the same, the leaves of the trees dipping into the wake as the boat passed, the small brown beaches moving with crabs and terns. Her hair blowing out behind her, the cup growing soft and waxy in her hands, she saw white birds and in the tops of trees, long woven nests swaying like chimes in the wind. Once she believed she saw the privy tipped over and aimed towards her like a gun, its two holes shining smartly, an Exit sign on the torn door rusting in the sun. When it was almost dark, they were there.

"Hey'er Foster, dontcha greet your guests! Hey'er!" the girl whooped over the cut of the motor as the hull thumped against sand. "Indian mound," Johnny said, pointing to the slight incline upon which the shack was built like a pyre. "Highest point on the islands." He wore a shirt with the sleeves cut out and a bracelet of beer rings. A black dog ran howling from the shack, its hind quarters curving ecstatically and leaped onto the boat pushing its head against everyone's hands, a ring of ticks around its eye.

"Well, Kit," her husband said, "a weekend totally free from work or worry. We can forget everything here, Kit. What do you think?"

She stroked the dog's bony head, absorbed the splashing of his quivering jowels and watched the feet in shower clogs come closer along the path through the litter of broken oars and fish skulls and dead horseshoe crabs with meat the color of cider.

"Welcome to Dismal Key," the hermit said, holding out his hand, slim and beautiful and soft as wool with filth.

He was small and seventy with sun-blackened lips, a beard corrupting the hollows of his face. His quest was a pure and thoughtless one, having no basis in fear or need, his reason for being on the island his lack of reason for being anyplace else. He had neither porch nor swing nor garden. He did have his dog and a crystal set and a big blond television upon whose voided screen he had pasted the picture of a beautiful and scornful movie star, since deceased. They existed, Foster and his dog, calm and starving, depending upon each other, allowing the mosquitoes to lay upon their lips as the sun rose and

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struck the tin roof, as the tide swept in and out and the afternoon rain gathered in the cistern. Both purblind, insensitive to color or time, sharing fish and cornbread and their wild desire not to die. He had taught the dog how to say, "I want my mama," how to count and dance and climb a ladder. In the candle-casted night, they would sing to each other. In the mornings, the dog would wake him and he would burn buttonwood bark to keep the gnats away.

"Lookit, Foster," the girl said, waving a bottle of gin. "Lookit what we brought you!"

"You're not mannered," he laughed, the sound creaking up from his lungs to rest foaming upon his mouth. "I can't have that. I'm only three months old."

"Been three months since we were here last, Foster. You dipped your bill then for certain."

His heart beat on obligingly like the lizzard's throat pumping upon the rock. The lizzard fled as Sag's foot came down, the rock powdered, a white turd.

Inside the shack the air was hot and still, the ashes lay in the grate, the bobcat's slender rotting paws hung motionless on the wall, a spider rocking on the strands between its bent ears. It looked absolutely like nothing that had ever been alive before. Kit sat down smiling, smothering in the heat, the scars on her arm puckering with sweat, grey rings hooping out beneath her neat shaved pits. In the kitchen amid sacks of garbage, rusting spoons, a pool of grey butter slumped on a plate, the long red stock of a bug gun, the men put out paper cups and sliced away ice from the cake with a hammer. The girl went easily to the gas stove and began frying bread in a pan. When the bread was done, she threw a steak into the grease and chopped onions over it. Kit, alone, looking out across the room, smiling, bewildered, at another room behind where the hermit sat, filled with ceiling high bunks and boxes of clay.

"Before this good dog here," the old man said, "I had another little dog name of 'Time.'"

"How nice." She could feel her eyes running beneath the eyeliner as she saw a bird hovering outside beneath the over-

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hang of tin, its plump belly bumping the pane. She smelled the gin, the filthy chewed rubber of the dog's toy, poised on the arm of the chair.

"That was quite a time ago of course. Little female." He was tucking himself into contentment, fingering the glinting safety pins pushed through his shirt. "The time come when 'Time' was taken in marriage by the town dandy, a handsome mastiff and as is fittin' he impregnated her. And as is befittin', the time come when 'Time' was to have her litter."

"Don't get dirty, Foster," the boy said, handing him a mug, holding his own glass bitten between his teeth as he lit a lantern. The bird disappeared into the tin, the corners of the room dipped in and out of blackness as the lantern swung with a creak and a clot of smoke.

"But the time passed. Everyone was gettin' concern. The doctor said that a Caesarean would have to be performed..."

"I heard this one, Foster," the boy said drinking, pouring, turning to Kit to add to her still-full glass, his breath sweet and raw, the flavor of crushed and festering berries, grinning at her, one capped tooth brighter than the rest. "Drink, Foster," he said. "We don't have the time. We're only here for the weekend."

"Please go on," Sag said politely.

Eternal hermit joke, cautiously prepared, unrecorded, belonging to the stars as he lay coughing one morning before the smoking buttonwood, perfected as he probed the dog's pink belly, pushed his fingers lovingly between its teeth, searching out its warm ladderback roof, messageless—his own creation whorling in the eddies of his weakening mind, soaking up the day, bringing the night and the slap of flying fish and then sleep, the story all his own, waiting for the telling.

"...nine beautiful pups were born. It was a phenomena. People from all over the country, from all over the world come to see..."

"Cheee-zuz," the boy roared, striding over to the old man, pouring gin into the mug, splashing it over his hands, a drop soaring to the bobcat's paw, holding there, glistening like a spark. He lobbed the empty bottles into one of the paper sacks

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and it tipped down the warped and slanting boards in a slow stream of grounds and juices and dusty fat. Foster sighed, sipped and put his drink carefully on the floor. He raised his hands, the veins massive as bone, and moved them out before him.

"Fishin's good. Snook, sheepshead, grouper—caught a baby tarpon over to Long Key." His hands cradled over the missing snout, the cool and dripping fin... "told him to go back and grow. See me in a year in time for the tournament."

Kit went to the bunk before the others, with the meat still humming in the pan, the trees tapping the windows in the night. She had brushed her teeth with baking soda, hunched teetering in the grass. She took off her blouse and buttoned it around a pillow, settling down away from the wall and the drift of spiders. She dreamt of polar bears clear as ice grazing like ponies over floes and then felt a roar, a colorless heave as the flood began and the glaciers rumbled together, petals of frost rising between the fissures.

Sag was moving another bunk across the floor, fitting it beside her. "I want to sleep with you," he said. Sweat hung from his brows and lashes and dripped upon her lips. When she next awoke she was on her stomach and felt the furred pulse of something beating softly upon her neck. She screamed and flung her arm madly behind her, fastening her fingers on it and hurling it howling and clicking across the room, moving as she threw, reaching the other room, stumbling against the grate, feeling cold ash sift onto her legs, searching for the door before she realized that there was nothing in this land she did not know that could save her.

"It was the kitten," the old man was saying, "it was Moses. It's all right, it was only Moses making biscuits, making up his bed." She held her breath trying to hear. "He wasn't here before. He sometimes comes down through a hole in the roof. It was only the kitten, don't be afraid."

She breathed deeply, crossed her arms before her breasts. "I'm sorry," she said. "I hope I didn't hurt him." She could not see the hermit, sitting on his bed in the darkness, the dog curled up beside him, breathing into his pocket.

"A stitch in Time saves nine," he said.

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"What?" she asked giddily, moving back toward the bunks.

He coughed. "A stitch in time saves nine."

"Yes," she said. "Oh, yes."

The next morning the boy caught a shark. It drifted up to the side of the boat, linen white, leisurely turning. Chalcedonic in the green below them. Kit and Sag drank warm beer, chewed oranges in the hot day, the wind bringing the smell of salt and new leaves.

"Shoot him, by God!" Johnny said, and she held the pistol in both hands and fired. There was a boil of water as the shark fled beneath the boat, bending the rod, and then something floated up through the wave and steam of bubbles, viscid, cakelike. The boy grunted, heaved the rod up over his shoulder and reeled in, mild pieces of plankton twisted to the line, moving back and forth beneath his thumb. "If he can't take a joke, I say to hell with him..."

The shark rose again, rolling, trussing itself in line. When it came close enough for her to see the remoras clustered on its belly, the girl fired again. The water hissed as though the shark's blood were flame, and two frigate birds drifted out from a distant tree.

"Lemon," Foster said. "Good sized Lemon."

Sag touched her knee. "My, my, shuga, will you ever look at that..."

She looked and saw a gaffed coffin, unfamiliar and blunt, rise dripping, a tenuous odor of no pardon, hard and shining, coffin-nosed, like her father's Cord sweeping through the dim afternoons, down the solitary roads past the possums and the pines good only for turpentine, into and through and out of her childhood, traveling remorseless as though through a tunnel, the long arrogant hood unwavering, casting back wine-red upon her folded hands, the buntings falling like leaves through the branches in the world beyond the raised window glass...

The boy brought the boat back to Foster's and heaved the shark upon the sand.

"Going to slit him open," he said, taking a knife from his tackle box, "and see what he had for breakfast."

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The dog was sniffing and barking, making small forays against the shark's side and then darting away. "I knew a man once," Foster said, digging his black toes into the broken shell of the beach, "burnt his hand off sticking it inside a shark's belly and that's the truth." The dog galloped by, its wide head grinning, and leaped up into the old man's arms, wriggling away again back to the shark, leaving sandy paw prints on that which was sinking without swimming, drowning in the air. The shells rustled like dry stalks.

"Uric acid. Smoldering innards. Burnt the knuckle bones right away because, if you'll excuse me," the old man said, turning to Kit, "it holds onto all its piss."

The boy flipped the knife into the shark's side where it fell as though it were going into a head of cheese. "If he can't take a joke, then I say to hell with him..." The girl was rubbing the sweat off her neck, congealing it in dark strings between her fingers and dropping it upon the ground. "It's relaxin' time. At least it is if we have any ice."

Up in the shack they drank and dozed, the old man sleeping with his head shuttling back and forth across his chest, his eyelids blinking like an animal who dreams of chase. The water and the sky were white and the trees were white and smoky in the sun. There was no shade or green anywhere.

"Such peace," Sag said. "I bless that boy from taking me away from all that workaday noise. I just bless him for bringing us here for awhile to this peace."

She was moving her fingers through the pages of a bird book—

> The alcids are black and white and silent. They come ashore only to breed...The harlequin duck is uncommon and shy. It summers on swift rivers and along arctic shores. It winters in the heavy surf along rocky coasts.

She thought of the thousands of impossible birds, rising at dawn to feed, gliding across barrenness, impregnated by the wind...

"I want to see a puffin," she said, "or an auklet. I want to see something rare."

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"Oh shuga," Sag laughed, blowing bubbles in his drink. "You can't see them 'roun here. You're not readin' the righ section."

She closed the book and stood up, saying slowly and to his face, her eyes meeting his large and kindly and empty ones, "I don't want peace anymore. There is too much peace." She turned, grazing her fingers along a dusty ledge, knocking her fist into the whorl of a conch before she reached the door. "I'm going for a walk."

"Don't get lost, Kit. Don't lose your way."

"How can I get lost?" she said. "There are no paths."

The door swung to and fell back against the soft wood frame. She stepped away down toward the water and the trees and swamp of mangrove sank in behind her, a silent and deliberate turnkey, with the shack fading in the bright air, looking not so much like an intrusion as only part of the wilderness that had failed.

She saw the sand still wet beneath the shark, saw clear drops pass around the knife handle onto the soaking rope that was tied tight around its body and she thought it was dead until she saw it move slightly, the tail dimly cracking on the beach.

She grasped the raveled end of rope and pulled, the shark moving sluggishly rolling but never turning, tumbling the shell behind it. When she was ankle deep in water, the small fish bumping against her feet, the water warmer than the day, holding her not like liquid but like cloth, she closed her eyes, relaxed her aching arms and then pulled again, out to deeper water until the shark was covered. She pulled the knife away and cut the rope, letting both sink and lodge beside her, and then spreading her fingers wide and settling them on the shark she pushed it back and forth, bubbles of motion forming, eddying around her red and stretched and aching hands, setting the shark forth once only to see it wobble and drift in the current with no instinct. She floundered in deeper and straddling it, swept it again through the water between her legs, making it cruise until with a lurch it had left her, falling away toward the deep channel like a crumbling trellis. She stood, still bent, her hands dripping on her knees, panting, watching the shark soundlessly dissolve from sight, fleeing like a bandit with a

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slit in its side, two bullets lodged on either side of its spare and tiny brain.

Bugs cast across the water. She felt the sun on her back.

"You'll find what's left of him floating tomorrow," Johnny said, standing shirtless on the beach, his chest white and narrow, his head cocked, a grin spreading slowly across his face like syrup sliding from a bottle. "Blood'll fall out of him like chum. The others will eat him."

She waded back to shore, ignoring his outstretched hand, conscious of her grafted flesh, the circus shades of skin taken from the secret parts of other bodies, the piebald pigment stretching down to the tip of her fingers, aware for the first time that he might be looking at it. "I don't like to see things like that," she said. "If you wanted it dead, you should have killed it."

He shrugged. "Wouldn't die." Then peevishly, childlike, "Sharks are bad. You saved a bad thing."

"I didn't save your knife," Kit said.

"Can always get another knife. His hide blunted it all to hell anyhow." He walked beside her, swinging his arms. "You know what your husband said to me? He said, 'Ah need yor' services, ma boy. A public man's bes fren' is the press.' He's a nice guy. Real mint julep."

"Sometimes," Kit said, "Sag doesn't at all know what he's talking about."

By dark, the gin was gone and Foster was in the woods, burying bottles and bags of garbage. "Buries them like a dog does a bone," Johnny said. "Thinks that if he digs them up next spring they'll be full again."

"C'mon," the girl said. "You was the one drinkin' it all. Foster musta been pourin' his in the bedclothes the way they smell." She turned to Sag and ran a finger over his unshaved chin. "Cuddiewoodoo," she giggled.

It began to rain. The lightning blinked on and off in the sky, frosting the trees, obliterating the eyes that swayed behind the leaves. The rain ran off the sharp edges of the house and they could hear the rivers forming, the lairs flooding, the mud settling over new roots. They could not speak beneath the clattering tin so they listened to the rain.

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The mattresses were damp and stinking. Kit rested her face against Sag's back, crowded her bare legs between his. The rain came through the sockets of rotted wood and splashed upon the floor. She kissed his ear but he did not move and she could not hear a thing, neither the kiss nor their heartbeats nor the bending of the springs. She could only hear the rain and watch the lightning light up the rain falling.

She had no dreams. She felt her breasts dampen first and then felt the wet hands cupped around them, the long loping body pressed around her own, harnessing her to him, one leg drawn over hers and spreading her apart. She moved her elbow back and into his ribs, but the boy just pulled himself more tightly against her. He was naked and wet and he slipped one hand now down over her belly and across her straining hips and turned her towards him.

"No. My God! Sag!"

Johnny wriggled on top of her, smelling like wheat, smelling like something just grown, pushing his soft lips against her face, resting upon her light and familiar, lapping her ear, mumbling something crude and innocent and meaningless, summing up a life that was unnecessary but alive, telling her in slang cliché, in perfect newspaperese, with his lips bubbling in her ear, his wet hair folded across her cheek, that what he was doing to her, for her, was careless but forever.

The skin was tight around his eyes and across his raised buttocks. From the bunk above her, yellow papers hung down beneath the rusting coils and he was writhing slow and solemn. Her fingers rose and rested.

"I'm broke out there," he said. "Don't touch me there."

She moved her hands up to his back and felt the bright bones and then he was stretching out cool inside her and curling like an ash and she was floating with no wounds and rising beautifully, her loins like snow.

Later, slung between the two men, she tried to rise, to push aside their sleeping weight, but she found herself bound there and she sank back between their damp thighs, the singing of their flecked and open mouths, and felt somehow, vaguely, horrorfully content.

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reproductions

of five paintings by

olivier mosset

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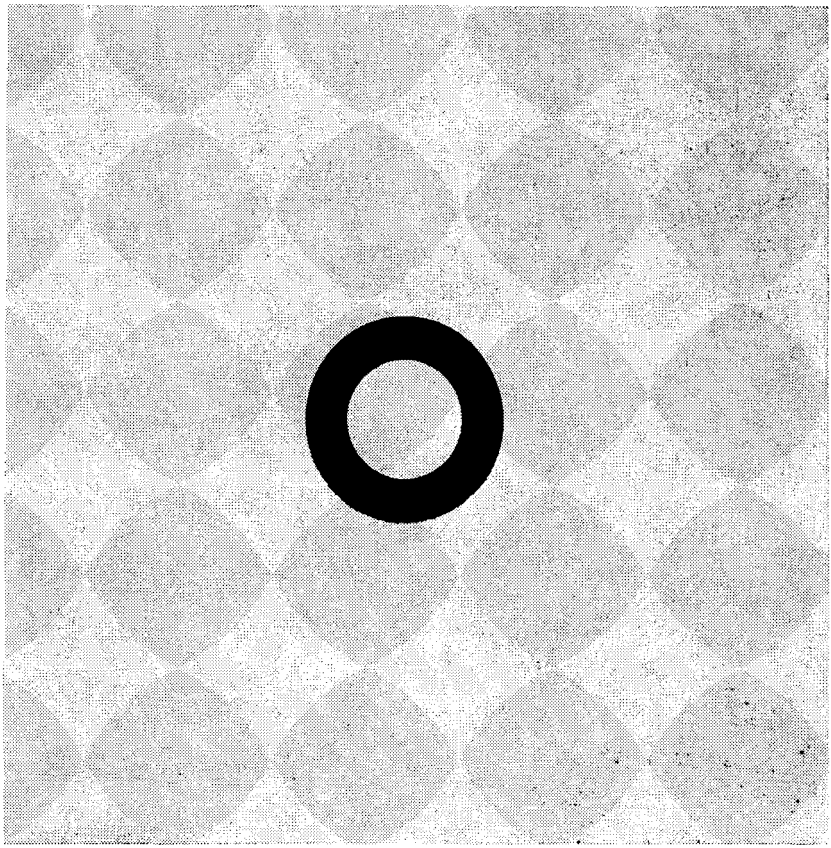

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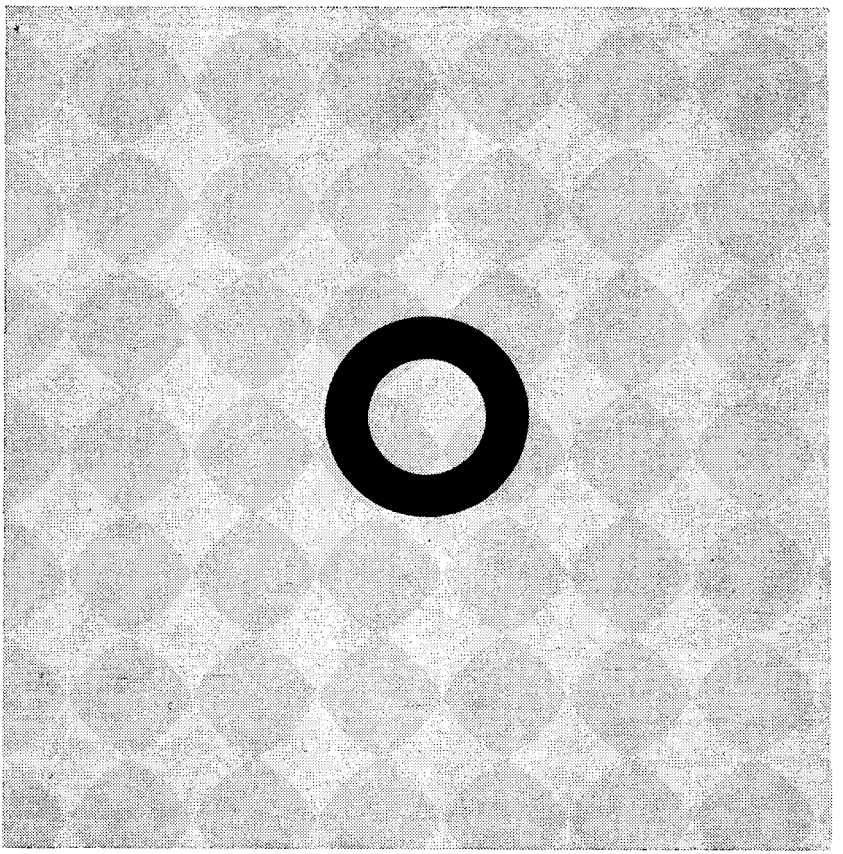

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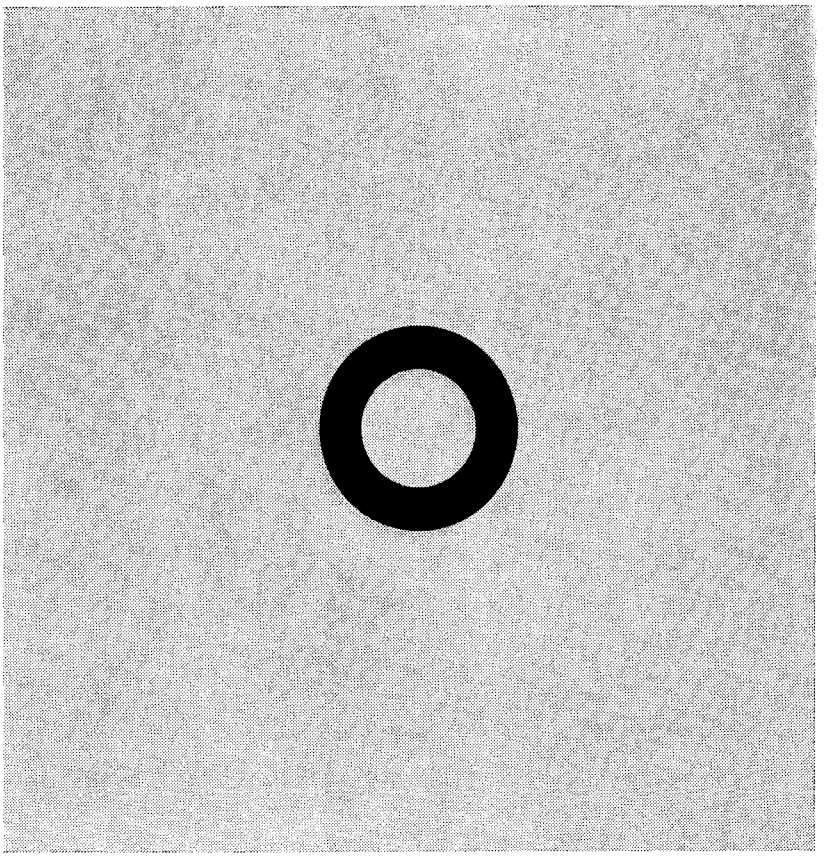

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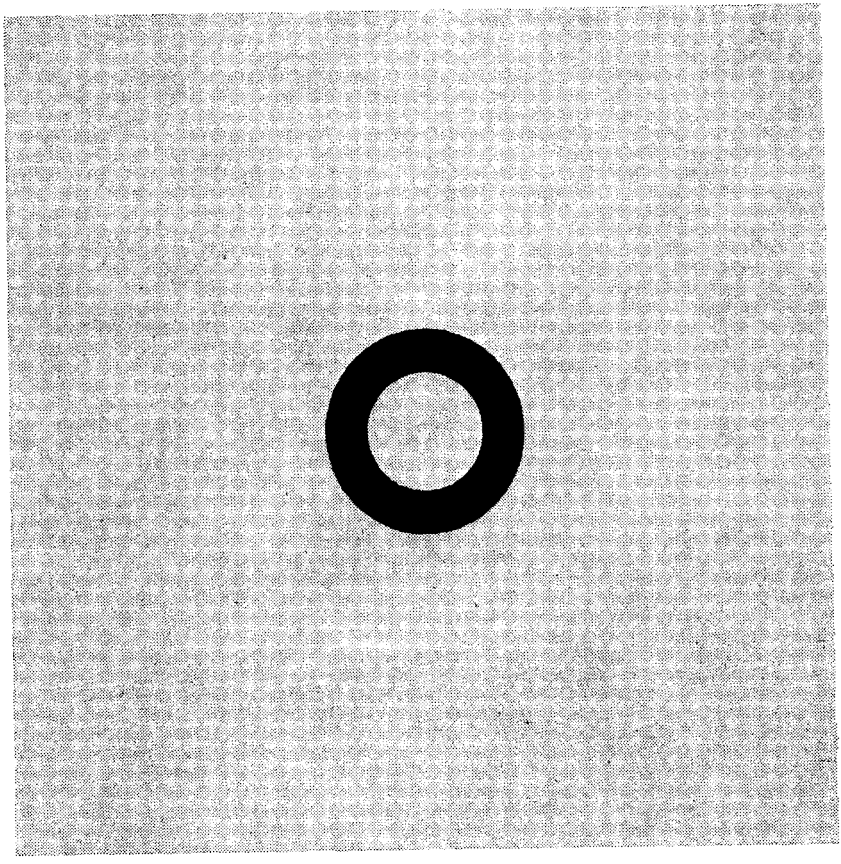

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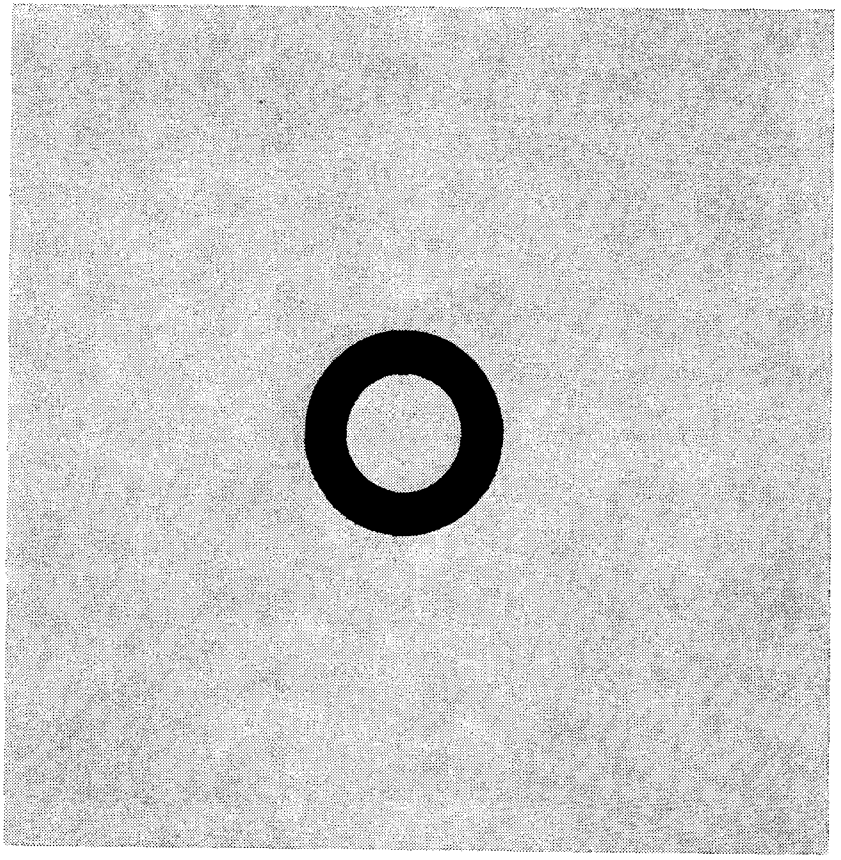

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Two Stories by Keith Cohen

At the Inlet

The slabs of marble were stacked in huge, sturdy heaps extending over nearly the entire deck of the ship and mounting toward the stern. A number of very wide pieces formed rough bases for these heaps. Smaller chunks had been haphazardly added on top, so that their imperfect conjunctions often formed deep crevices and sudden gaps. At one point a small cavern formation had been created by the meeting of a tabular piece that declined at one end with a naturally tilting piece shoved across its downward slanting. From this rough marble cavity Praxiteles stood up and threw over his naked body the tunic that lay to one side. The Attic coast had just been sighted. He squinted toward the land and pushed himself up onto his toes. Then he sat back down for a moment on the mass of marble.

Their port is not far from this blown stretch of beach where people are already beginning to congregate around the various platforms. Located, however, on one side of a jutting portion of the coast, the port cannot be seen from any considerable distance down the beach along this peninsular curve. Praxiteles is climbing up various levels of the vast deposit of marble that covers three-quarters of the ship deck. Now and then he stops, stands up straight, and looks toward the land.

No one is at the port but the dock hands and a scattering of sailors. When the ship is docked, Praxiteles leaves only a word with his men and the port haulers. No one accompanies him as he walks up the pier and reaches the sandy shore.

Clouded sky in her eyes ... Ephesus ... the pre-conceived idea ... what other blanks ... toward a source ... the haul ... alabaster and sand ...

Swineherd welcome? ... fisherman among the imagined ...

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constantly reiterates ... on board ... bring over ... colors of Ethiopia ... standing, the hands ... sand ... the off-cuttings ... falling from motion ... Phryne ...

Why Phryne? Because your skin is as white as Pentelic marble.

(... leaning back against a cushion.) Phryne stood on a simple unenclosed platform that extended several lengths above the sand in which it was imbedded. The weight of her body was shifted neither to one side nor to the other. Her hands were cupped together at her waist, palms toward the sky, and her thumbs touched and pointed away from her. The warm breeze that came up from the water moved not only the loose folds of her gown at the shoulder, the waist, and the feet, but also agitated the few strands of hair that had loosened themselves from the braids beneath the tight net. These strands blazed around her head like solar explosions.

"I was much chagrined, my dearest Praxiteles, to find that you had really gone this morning. You left your servants with a story that did, I'll admit, roughly correspond to the one you gave me. But it still seems to me incomprehensible that you have chosen this sweetest season of the year to go off on one of your "safaris" for new marble (new mistresses).

"But while you're away think of me and my visits to the Acropolis. The boys of today possess the sceptres of tomorrow."

(Signed)
Phryne

CORRUPTION OF THE YOUTH, for which charge the penalty being DEATH

Phryne is led down the banks from the city to the beach by six guards. The guards are of equal height and each gives an appearance of great strength. Their long tunics are tightly bound by bright bands at all points except at their knees. From behind these loose lower folds, hairless and anointed legs march forward. The calf of each leg bulges slightly against the unfurling material that it outstretches. The path to the beach winds among low-lying green bushes that begin to disappear as the ground becomes sandy. Step after step sinks slightly

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more; the earth begins to give. They diminish their pace. Their arms continue to swing, however, in the same manner. Phryne, whose arms hesitate to lift her skirts up slightly, feels the breaking warmth of the sand at her feet.

"New marble! I know you're bored. And you have me forever as I am—the 'Artemision' at Ephesus, the 'Porne of Athens'... Stay as you are with me now."

Phryne stood up from his bed and listened for his movements. She fastened her tunic together with the single broach at the shoulder and held her hand motionless there.

On the lowest level of the monastery, partially underground, the bare meditation cells were arranged in long straight rows divided by narrow aisles. The ground was cool and moist here. Even the wooden doors were crumbling at the bottom with dampness. Haedosis' feet retained the criss-cross red marks from the tight straps of his sandals. Phryne stood up from his bed and listened for his movements. Her bare feet took hold of the cool earth.

Another place was the parapets of the fortress itself. This circle of walls ran tangent to the edge of the adjoining forest. At this point the smell of new brambleberries and elm leaves swept across the high parapet and vanished. There were no footsteps, no waves. The long robes that Lyses brought from the surplus chambers had lost their even folds and now turned up roughly seamed parts of their underside. Phryne stood up from his bed and listened for his movements. The smell of tallow and worms produced by the robes found its ceiling below her breasts and the moving breeze from the woods.

Early in the morning the window became important. Very soon the small silver chain that hung at Andreus' wrist slipped down across the back of his hand almost to his knuckles. The semicircle thus formed suggested a similar, though unlighted, shape underneath his wrist and tangent to the edge of the bedding. The skin was dark against the silver chain and yielded no marks at the position from which the chain had slipped. Phryne stood up from his bed and listened for his movements. She lit the candle and watched the morning light drop away from the window.

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Hypereides had talked on the beach all morning to judges and citizens.

"On this most sacred of holidays, Phryne, I wish you good health, happiness, and many voyages. As for my own trip to Smyrna, the sea voyage still fascinates me, as I told you that night. I'm almost tempted to write my friend right now to say somehow or other I will be there. You know well enough that my attendance at the seminary has been less an indication of family position than of the state's recognition of some genuine beliefs even I thought I had at one time. Being line-tender on my father's fishing boat was no joy (remember, I showed you the scars that the ropes left when I used to try holding them down between my legs,) but ever since then I've had dreams of losing sight one day of the Attic coast.

"In spite of your 'deep shame,' they'll still admit you, won't they? Please call on me soon."

(Signed)
Andreus

Perhaps the first event that led ultimately to unfavorable attention was Phryne's participation in the rites of a secret cult. Her zeal in this respect was already well-known and might not have been so serious, had not the ceremonies been mockingly conducted by a few of the pre-initiates at the seminary, Phryne's own intimate group. The truth is that the boys were able to obtain rather easily most of the equipment that was required and had gone ahead quite far with their plans before Antisthenes found them out and called together the rest of the guards. Nor had the boys failed to take into consideration the prevailing conditions, the speed and direction of the wind, the density of the atmosphere, and the proximity of the normal guard watches. What they were most cautious about was the torches. Yet this was an indispensable part of the ceremony. Andreus had managed to steal several of the great enameled robes that the priests normally wore during these initiations. They would change in and out of these robes as each one took his turn in "the rites." They had little need, however, for the genital replicas which played a part in the ceremony that by this time had become (whispered) common know-

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ledge among all the pre-initiates. Phryne's part in the act seemed far more glorious than that of her artificial counterpart. And since she had long before taught each one how best to make use of her own part, they were convinced of their endeavor to sanctify the act that had come itself to embody the Eleusinian mysteries, which they sought to comprehend. Those who wore the sacred robes recited verses over the bodies of Phryne and whichever initiate was at her side. The rest of the boys took on the duties that remained. First, several anointed the body of the initiate with oils and diluted perfumes. They then placed him on a long plank and laid him next to Phryne, who remained leaning against a number of shiny and massive cushions. The male was obliged to remain in this position until the priests had finished. Then, as the torch-bearers began the ritual dance, waving the flames from the ground to the sky, the initiate turned to Phryne and, hailed and incited by the deep chants of the dancers, coupled himself to her. Once this was done, they waited for a short time and then began to prepare the next initiate.

* * *

Although Praxiteles had certain regrets upon leaving Athens, he wasted no time making his way to Phalerum where he had contracted a small vessel. Apart from one letter he received in the midst of rigging the ship out, there were no interruptions in his preparations for sailing. He set sail early in the morning on the fourth day out of Athens.

Writing that rolls down from the horizon ... we'll be in Egypt ... the eyes the Attic coast wears ... the arms ... after every inlet ... only an impression that the cushion had ... a preconceived idea ... would servants have enjoyed ... or premeditated ... she is sinking ... concave spreading ... what inlet, what source ... solidarity ... a nude over the Academy ... alabaster and earth ... a nude on stilts ... on the stairs to the Prytaneum ... alabaster, alabaster ... Egyptian marble, eyes of Artemis ... a nude horizon ... running strokes ... light impressions, like ribs ... or else the waves ... spreading hair and

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impulse ... colors of Ethiopia ... how many moments in marble ... lying, posing ... ready, waiting ...

... be in Egypt ... which Acropolis ... with one thought: the Ethiopian quarries ... fields to stretch between extra borders ... or of a vase ... Ephesus, what the Academy will say ... breakers ... crumbling wood ... a pathway back, an earth pathway ... a coming forward ... us, a dark horizon ... or else Alabaster ... the north ... valleys between the eyes ... forwards, nakedness ... for a fine ankle ...

But the African stratification proved less desirable than Praxiteles had expected. By the time he and his small band had journeyed from the Egyptian coast southward to Asmara, five days had elapsed. They were exceedingly anxious by this time to have a look at the structure and arrangement of the quarries. The defects however, of the alabaster and granite, greatly disappointed Praxiteles. In the end he did find several areas from which good-sized pieces could be cut, but he still was unsure as to their suitability for the Artemision commission.

* * *

The warm breeze that comes up from the water moves not only the loose folds of her gown at the shouder, the waist, and the feet, but also agitates the few strands of hair that have loosened themselves from the braids beneath the tight net.

* * *

I tell you, Symphonia.

Praxiteles took only his youngest and best-looking male servants with him. So says Leandra, and she was there when he gave the orders and made final plans for the voyage. He was finally unsure of his own universal powers of seduction, so he devised a plan whereby his servants would bring him new bed-partners at *every minute*.He accomplished this without losing the support of his men, because their large number allowed him to promise them the consumption of every third girl they collected—and in quarters equal in comfort to his own.

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I have it from the best sources, Symphonia.

They went first to Phalerum and there lost no time putting the plan into operation. While Praxiteles saw to it that the ship was getting properly rigged, his men set at once to work finding him, and themselves, fresh mistresses. Praxiteles established himself in the finest quarters and for the first few days managed to get along by the fruit of the local courtesans. After two or three days more, his men had exhausted their talents, so they set off for Africa, where Praxiteles expected to export at least one entire harem of native beauties. He did send one find he had made in Phalerum back to Athens to await his return and enlisted several other Phalerian courtesans onto the ship.

They were at sea for only a short while before Praxiteles went up to the observatory, which had been built between the three central masts just below the halliards. From here he could see for a great distance in any direction. It was not long before he spotted some rocks covered with beautiful mermaids. He swam to them himself and, after his first success, scarcely required the aid of his men, for the mermaids swam back to the ship with him. These mermaids were all tail. Praxiteles took his favorite up to the observatory with him. They did not last long, however, and, suffering from the lack of marine environment to which they were habituated, they soon became fishy masses beneath unsatisfied sailors. The men ceremoniously cast the bodies overboard and looked up to their master who had already begun scanning the waters once more.

During this and succeeding episodes with mermaid colonies, the Phalerian wenches dressed in walrus furs and took cushions into the dayroom. They nibbled on salads with capers and olives.

Praxiteles and his men crossed the Mediterranean with such rapacious fury, looting every pleasure palace from here to Cairo, that it is small wonder the black continent greeted them with an erection. Or so it seemed to Praxiteles, who was up in his observatory when land was first sighted. The courtesans were struck by this announcement and quit the dayroom at once for the bow so that they could see for themselves.

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They had to agree that Egypt—and, in fact, all of Africa—seemed to be getting an erection, though they chose to interpret the phenomenon to their own advantage. One of them became so excited as the ship was reaching port that she jumped off and swam ashore. The men marched confidently down the gang planks upon their arrival and feasted on the renowned Egyptian honey before setting forth toward the fields of Ethiopia.

* * *

Hypereides has talked on the beach all morning to judges and citizens. When Phryne, surrounded by six guards, reaches the beach, the judges begin slowly filling the tribunal stand. Members of the jury stand by as Phryne is placed upon the wooden platform. The mass of citizens faces the sea and irregularly covers the beach area around the tribunal and platform. Some press toward the front to be nearer the circular clearing provided for the lawyers; others converse in the back. A small group of women march in a circle near the path of Phryne. They perform one of the customary rituals of Priapus, except that, for want of the normal effigies, they hold a single finger up toward the sky and clasp the wrist with the other hand. Several of the women jeer lowly as Phryne passes by. From behind the lower folds of the guards' tunics, hairless and anointed legs march forward. At this moment, the head judge lets down from his wrist the length of his trailing robe, as he reaches the center of the tribunal. He sits down, and Hypereides makes efforts to continue what he has been saying by circling around behind the tribunal and leaning forward to the seated form in the center. But the judge, without turning toward Hypereides, rises and begins to address the assembly.

By the time Phryne emerges onto the court clearing, Andreus, who has been pushing his way through the crowds of citizens at the opposite end, runs across the sandy place to the platform that Phryne is approaching. His knees dig into the sand as he throws himself down before the platform. Phryne bends forward and speaks to Andreus, who, motionless, has

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half-covered with sand his heavy dark tunic and the baggage he wears pinned to his back. He now looks up slowly in Phryne's direction and stares at her without speaking.

An official of the court leaves his post along the inside boundary of citizens and rushes up to Hypereides. He pulls Hypereides by one shoulder and speaks into his ear, pointing erratically and surreptitiously with one raised finger of his outstretched arm at Andreus. But Hypereides does not turn toward him and instead hurries around to the back side of the tribunal.

As the members of the jury climb onto their platform, Andreus' servant, who has been left on the outskirts of the crowd, begins to walk a wide semicircle around the masses of people. He is bent over slightly. He carries large leather traveling bags in either hand, and fat fruit baskets hang from his arms. At his sides are strapped numerous flagons and small clay containers. He walks slowly and stops approximately opposite the point where he was originally left. Again he stands still.

Without getting to his feet, Andreus turns upon the jury members and speaks to them, waving his hands first toward them and then toward Phryne with broad denunciative gestures. Having just taken their position and their attention having been at once directed toward Andreus, the members of the jury do not look toward the tribunal. In a few moments Andreus becomes more violent in his gestures. His voice grows louder and his words, though forceful, come with less ease. He begins to rise to his feet but then sinks back to his knees in silence. With this he suddenly turns back toward Phryne. Slowly he bends toward her and places his lips to her feet. He then walks from the clearing and passes up an aisle that is formed in the mass of onlookers to his servant who is waiting for him beyond the crowd. They pour no libation and begin their short walk down the beach.

It is at this moment that the head judge rises and begins to address the assembly. He speaks lowly but clearly. Now and then he turns toward Phryne and makes a nodding motion, bending very slightly at the waist. He stretches out his arms simultaneously toward the general crowd and slowly brings

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them back to his side. He goes on talking for a short time, turning his head once in a while toward the platform of jurists.

"... for eight months to have lived in this monastery of initiates where one thousand amateur visionaries are isolated against the influence of the feminine sex by a high stone enclosure! Did I tell you of the one great relief I used to have before you came to me?

"Come tonight, Phryne. That old Antisthenes at the door is none the wiser. I am crouched in the corner waiting for you."

(Signed)
"Your little black-haired one"
Haedosis

Hypereides and Euthias briefly bow to the head judge and then turn from the platform. The two orators approach Phryne's platform where they again speak the regular oaths, bow, and part. Euthias steps before the jury and the crowd. His intonation is high and clear, and each sentence has a climax in volume very near the end. He cites the numerous cases of Phryne's guilt in logical order, providing the names of those people involved and the locations. Although he stands still, his right hand often swings straight out in Phryne's direction, the fingers remaining rigidly closed together.

The three of them meet on the point of the coastline. Praxiteles takes his leave at once of Andreus and the servant and continues walking. Certain of the beach paths wind among low-lying green bushes that begin to disappear whenever the ground becomes sandy.

Hypereides on his knees before the jury members.

Bent back ... marble strictures ... the new commission ... age and the worn-down shininess ... running ... every inlet ... a clearing in the woods ... cries ...

She held her hand motionless there.

Hypereides has marched from one extremity of the clearing to another. He has called up toward the sky for Phryne's sake. He has attacked all that Euthias has said and provided contrary evidence. He has even thrown himself down before the jury members, some of whom simply boo in return. Hypereides

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now raises himself to his feet and walks toward the platform where Phryne stands. He steps up to her level and places his hand on the single brooch at her left shoulder. As the pin of the brooch is pulled away, its point releases the material at one penetration and passes behind this small portion of the gathered folds. The material is unloosed again at the second penetration. Hypereides takes the brooch away and steps back from the platform.

The tunic falls away from her shoulders. solar explosions
The tunic unravels from her arms. sand blankets
The tunic is lashed out by her swelling breasts. "of the youth"
The tunic falls down along her back. a paste from the sea
The tunic glances her sides. beams diffused
The tunic bunches up at her hips. vanguard ascension
The tunic slips off around her buttocks. ground smooth and melts
The tunic skims her thighs, her calves. at every inlet
The tunic falls down around her bare feet. dark entry

Thus I walked on into sanctity. My field was filled in an instant, the sky clogged. My men's warnings were still on board; the sea dried slowly away. What was left with the marble was merely a map of the Ethiopian highlands. What was left on the pedestal explained a vanishing order.

Please stay here in the foam of the sea. You are munificently attended, but so warmly splash in the brine. Your sons' sins are a prize for the next community. Your solitary laurels are ulterior instincts and your palace desire. Please stay here in the form of the very promontory that supports you and spreads out around you, at once maker and made.

This blown stretch of beach remains unchanged. The assemblies have dispersed; the tide has settled. Hypereides has mounted the hill some time ago and declaims again in the market place. At one moment the head judge rolls his eyes. He turns and reviews the face of Euthias. Praxiteles awakes dry and feels the sharp salt under his leg as he rubs it against Phryne's. The low-lying green bushes retire noiselessly. Here and there the ground becomes sandy.

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Keith Cohen

Grecian Dreams

The words stretch evenly across the two pages of the opened book and make large symmetrical blocks of fibred gray when seen from a distance, like fluted metal roofs seen from the air. Anne looks up from the text often, her eyes circling around the table from head to head. There is, as always, in this gaze a question she seems to be asking herself—quite apart from the questions she has prepared. Because of the way she is sitting, leaning a bit over the table against her crossed arms, the sharp V-neck of her dress is particularly responsive to the movements of her head. The usually rather close fit of this black dress, made of soft material, is temporarily modified by the pressure of her arms. As she turns her head from the left in a slow half-circle to the right, the right side of the neck opening buckles slightly. There is at the deepest point of perception the suggestion of light—not reflected light, but a paling of color that marks where her breast swells out. She meets my eyes frequently, but only in the matter of course around the table. She finds nothing unusual in the way I watch (part of the time, in fact, my eyes, as those of the others, are perched at some invisible cliff directly over the book), or else her eyes would no longer seem, as they always seem, like those of Miranda, who afterwards, dissatisfied...

"There is a rock, where, as they say, the ocean dew distils, and from its beetling brow it pours a copious stream for pitchers to be dipped in; it is here that I had a friend washing robes of purple in the trickling stream, and she was spreading

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them out on the face of a warm sunny rock; from her I first heard that my mistress was wasting on the bed of sickness, pent up within her house, a thin veil covering her golden hair...."

With the first bite came the sight of a yellow hat on the boat that was cruising down the river toward me. It was Mme. l'Honneur's. Today another day of her daily luncheon. A boating excursion.

"Well-off people proud that their eldest son was in the navy."

My idea was a solitary picnic. But it turned out that there were few shady spots along the Loire. Mainly cement slabs stretching up the banks from the water. There were also two boys splashing each other on the shore and napping workmen, probably from somewhere on the other side of the bridge.

"DÉPÊCHE L'HONNEUR, 2/6/59.—SUBJECT SPOTTED ON SOUTH SHORE OF LOIRE. PONT WILSON. UNACCOMPANIED.—SMALL CRAFT CABLE." This, all the way up the bank.

I circled around a short, thick patch of formal shrubbery and found myself on a small pavilion surrounding a memorial to the American soldiers killed in World War II. I sat myself and the various wrappings of lunch down on a low wall facing the memorial, which was sculpted in bronze. It caught the high sun in many different places at once, and the glare made it difficult to discern the actual position of limbs and heads in the battle frieze. After downing what was left of the carbonated iced lemonade, I crossed the lawns to the front of the Bibliothèque Municipale. The librarian at the door of the main room refused to admit me with the empty lemonade bottle, out of which I wanted to make an unusual kind of model submarine—just for decoration. He did consent, however, to hold it for me behind the heavy rosewood desk. I went first to Greek Literature and began to move slowly alongside the high, old shelves, scanning the various titles. At Pindar I was led around a corner into a small room. Here the dimness of the central part of the library was relieved by

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long windows and new steel shelving, whose sharp lines were punctuated only at the joints, where silver screw heads protruded in cold bumps. Anne was there, staring out the window to the ground several stories below.

The bank of the river began with large cement squares mounting from the water to the grass that extended from the bridge down the river as far as could be seen. Each row of squares was staggered to the one beside it by a half square, so that every other row met the grass with the completion of half a square. On the grass near the bridge, two men were lying down. The first man, lying nearest the bridge and approximately parallel to it, lay flat with his hands behind his head, the left hand over the right. The other, lying with his head closest to the library and making a smaller than forty-five degree angle with the bridge, laid his hands haphazardly across his chest. One leg was bent at the knee and the ankle of the other leg rested against it.

The evacuation helicopter has been sighted settling down between the masses of scorched shrubs.

Two more men, wearing the same dark green shirts and trousers as the first two, rested in a stooping position next to each other on the cement. The one to the left faced his companion. All their weight was concentrated on the balls of their feet, and they rolled the bottoms of their elbows on their knees so that the upper part of their bodies slanted forward. Away from the bridge, much farther down the river, were two small boys directing the course of a toy sailboat. Their passage along the side of the river was indicated by the long strip of irregularly wetted cement squares. The deep gray of the wet cement grew lighter and finally disappeared near the library. The two boys continued gradually down the river, remaining about three squares apart from each other the whole time.

Hesitant to cross her field of vision, I turned and quickly selected a book from the shelves on the opposite side of the doorway before she turned from the window. Xenephon's endless march up from the rosy battlefields. "The march of Time." Instead, I wandered much of the afternoon outside

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that room.

"And Juliet is the sun."

It was about 6:30 when she came out of the room and left the library carrying a small satchel. I put my books back and left the room almost immediately afterwards, but first I went over to her seat near the window. It was dusk, and the whole river bank seemed like the sound one makes in fogging up the lens of a pair of glasses. The cement border retained more of the afternoon light than anything around it.

"It's not so much that we cannot 'escape from history'..." It was a small, wrinkled old man, resting his forearms level on the desk, who was speaking to the librarian. "It's that we find it difficult to be selective in taking the blow of history."

The librarian turned to me and, without smiling, handed me my lemonade bottle from behind the desk. "...making a firm present out of an infirm past," the little old man was saying. "And yet there's a great portion of the past that's got to filter through in one way or another."

The steel bridge shot across the river as I went down the steps of the library. She had just started across. I moved up to rue Nationale with others from the library, who disappeared into small restaurants, and then headed toward the river. It was darker now. Everything around us was still except the river and a boy who was sitting on the far bank just at the beginning of the cement slabs and eating a huge chunk of bread. Along the wide quai that curved with the river, the regular line of trees faded into or else was absorbed by the large houses behind. "House against house, brother against brother!" But she did not turn into this street as I had expected. Instead, she turned around and started back across the bridge. I was about at the mid-point of the bridge, and, not wishing her to see me, for fear she may have noticed me in the library, I crossed to the other side and looked down into the water. Before she passed me I even dropped the lemonade bottle into the water in an attempt to be as nondescript as possible. A rash act—a secret spy mission?!—since the bottle made a loud smacking sound when it hit the water. I wanted to know if it caught her attention.

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As I was about to resume following her, she reached the place where she had first walked onto the bridge, and she turned around again. She continued walking back and forth across the bridge for about a quarter of an hour. At last she left the bridge in the direction she had originally taken. I followed her past large town houses, some of whose doors were already lit by the large reconverted gas lamps at their sides, past a great municipal mansion, whose Victorian bays and gables were complemented in several places by pagoda-shaped roofing, and into a quiet square where, in earlier hours, the fish market was to be found. There was only the circulation of a few people along the sidewalks. Around the square three or four thick neon signs were chalked against the darkened buildings.

"...mais leurs rangs peuvent se mêler, se rompre."

I didn't follow her into the restaurant she entered at the far end of the square. The door opened silently until, at its widest, it made three sharp clicks like wood when it burns. She laid her satchel behind the coat rack on the lower shelf of a small end table. In this way it was partially hidden by a thin needlepoint covering that was spread across the top and hung down about halfway to the floor.

* * *

"There was that maiden in Oechalia, an unwed girl who knew yet neither suitor nor married joys; the queen of Love snatched her from her home across the sea and gave her to Alcmena's son, amidst blood and smoke and murderous marriage-hymns, to be for him a frantic fiend of hell...."

Her head stops in mid-circuit, she smiles and says, "Mr. Bunker?" He has blond, very thin hair, which intrudes little onto his pale forehead and begins to leave large spaces at the back of his head. His nose is long, sharp at the crest; it moves very slightly at the tip, vibrating, as he asks about the dual nature of certain gods, such as those who, inciting repeated conflict among the mortals, were worshiped as benefactors nonetheless. She mentions several gods who do have these

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specifically dual-, or multi-personalities, at the same time pushing her text flat against the table with the heel of her hand. As she holds down the pages tightly at either side with the spread thumb and forefinger of her hands, she goes on to remark that it has little relevance here. Looking up and down between his text and her questioning expression, which is thus frozen for only a few moments, he explains why he thought it was relevant. This leaves her no other choice but to summarize why it is not relevant and to select a polite transitional phrase that carries us back to the text and permits her head to complete its circuit.

The first day was about the same. Her circuits were approximately regular, leveled over the plane of the long table. From outside, tangible journeys on the IRT appeared across the close walls and their explosions clattered overhead. The air-friction devices of the Broadway bus sprayed networks of flapping doors up through the window, and songs and catcalls ricocheted, as comets, from the ceiling to the floor.

* * *

The first time I want to Georgetown, the old part of Washington where I knew Dumbarton Oaks was located, in spite of my specific intention to get at least as far as the gardens of the famous estate, I didn't even have the courage to step through the gates. Instead, I went to a temporary art exhibition of modern objectivists on O Street. The following day I arrived at Dumbarton Oaks very early in the morning; I wanted to get used to being there by visiting the small museum which opened a few hours before the main property. The air was crisp and the trees that hung above the museum stood out sharply against the solid blue sky as I went in. There were several corridors lined with glass cases enclosing the most important documents of the international peace talks held at Dumbarton Oaks in 1944. In one was the roster of diplomats that had attended, listed in alphabetical order rather than by country. The presentation of these names on the page was not so complicated as that of the resolutions made at the meetings.

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These were written in large hand-lettered print at the top of scroll-shaped paper. Typed and indented below each of these were the various conditions, followed usually by a series of amendments, further indented. These flattened scrolls appeared in a glass-covered cabinet, larger than the other cases, which was lined with tight blue velvet.

From the back of the mansion of which I saw only enough to note where the Harvard studies and libraries could be found, the partitioned gardens fell lower and lower. For me, each entry meant an immediate search for the steps leading to another pathway or to the adjacent garden. In a few of them I could stand at a low wall and look down on the other gardens below, which all led eventually to a wire fence that separated the chambered property from a dense park. There were only two points, however, at which entry into the park was possible. Following the one nearest the west border of the property, I was soon on a narrow trail that ran at first parallel to the fence and then crossed it at a natural separation in the meshing. To my left the park land reached a great height within a short space—a height equivalent to that of the mansion, so that the slope was much steeper, resembling the inside of a soup bowl. The creek that ran at the base of this slope curved rather sharply not far from the fence and continued more or less parallel to it. I had penetrated Dumbarton Oaks, and, after no more than a few moments within these hallways I had long waited to enter, I had left it, both mansion and property. At least I was going to see the gardens more closely on my way back out. I walked along the creek, crossed it back and forth at several points, and sat on straight wooden benches along its edge.

"I would then come to the apple-bearing bank of those minstrels in the west, where the ocean's lord no longer grants passage to sailors across the deep dark waters... I would not know how to call any child of man happy; for that which was first has turned and now is last."

Toward the opposite end of the property a narrow concave gutter ran from within the estate down to the creek. Although the gutter itself, made of small mosaic tiles set in an unordered

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pattern of greens, yellows, and browns, was carefully shaped and set into the ground, the cement borders that extended over about six inches of the ground to either side were unsmooth and irregular at the edges. When I leaned over the gutter and looked up in the direction of the estate, the thin constant sheet of water reflected the sun in several places up the hill until it disappeared. I walked up along this gutter until the fence was in view. There I lay down on a soft patch of grass mixed with a small-leafed ivy and fell asleep.

I didn't sleep for long, and when I awoke I found that I had rolled onto my side and that my cheek was resting against the cement border of the gutter. As I stood up and started toward the fence, I remembered I had been dreaming about getting slapped in the face by a cement surface. Then I realized it probably involved a recollection of a painting by Jasper Johns called "Cement Slap" which I had seen the day before. I re-entered the Dumbarton Oaks property near the intersection of the gutter and the fence and, after following a border wall straight up as far as the herb garden, I crossed to the mansion and found the private study they had assigned to her.

We come in from the calendar patio off the east porch. The library is dim; no one is using it. Eighteenth-century portraits hang above glass-covered shelves of books. We talk at random as we proceed along the shelves, noting a few artists in some instances. On several occasions we stop before one of the portraits, and she stares at it for a while. I am immediately led to follow her gaze, as if she were pointing out something through a window. We look at each other and then continue. At the end of the room we come to a portrait preceded, I notice, by a brief, uncontrollable smile across her lips. It is impossible to tell whether this smile is on my account or comes from a thought she has had. I have said nothing. The portrait is of a young boy with a chunk of bread. It is all very dim. There is only the suggestion of light springing out of the boy's drab clothing and spreading across his face and hands and across the bread, which has a coarse and grainy texture like a broken corn loaf.

"I first happened to read about it in a book on Diderot;

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then I saw the original in Paris. But I never realized how much I liked it or how much I was affected by it until I saw a boy on a riverbank who was eating bread and sitting in almost the same position. I was walking across a bridge in Tours —and at first I couldn't figure out why this ordinary scene seemed so familiar and made me want to stop short on that bridge and throw over my satchel."

She turns from the portrait and looks at me. I still say nothing. I only ask her if that's what she did, and she explains that she felt more at ease going back and forth on the bridge. She did finally remember the portrait and, pleased mainly by the great sense of completion or "rounding-out" of the experience, she made the last trip over the bridge back into the streets. Although I notice a greatly increased warmness in everything she says, I still say nothing. I have suddenly, of course, remembered Tours. But only briefly. Actually I had been reminded of a picture, too, that day I fell asleep in the park. But this portrait reminds me of certain civic posters preserved out of the recent past, such as those which showed a child left homeless in Europe or others which showed the face of a young soldier weak from fighting, all, by their admitted sentimentality, intended to enlist aid of one kind or another from the viewer. The portrait here is not a great deal less sentimental. Its dramatic lighting and fading of detail are quite accomplished, but its dominant quality it shares with the war posters. Perhaps, as we continue by making a full circle around the room, she is thinking the same thing.

We come out upon a hedge-bordered walkway. It is true that I have so far seen little of the ornate gardens. Her eyes exceed all the light of the morning and climb the moist bricks of the stairway toward the hard red blossoms drooping down from the trees we pass. It is the fountain of month-gods that she wants to show me. We look down from the fenced terrace of the wading pool and see the sun reflected brilliantly across the near end of the central fountain and again across two sections of the wide moat that encircles it. From the wall along the outer border of this moat the faces of twelve gods spit streams of water and gaze at the huge spouting fountain before them.

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I take her hand and we follow the winding brick steps.

"Not so much for the want of what we have never known, as for the loss of that to which we have been long accustomed."

We walk around the inside of the moat, which is bridged in four places. Her eyes are watching me for the first time. They turn back with renewed interest toward each successive face carved in stone. If I sat behind these faces, locked in concrete, but quite alive.... Yet from the very top of the fountain, spouting in the center, I see her, as she lies down and looks back at the circuit of stone faces she has just finished walking. But her eyes turn away and shine with still more brilliance, reflecting the twelve small streams and the great central one in her perfectly level and unblinking eyes. For in the sky she sees the sun. And around the sun, arranged in a perfect circle, are the twelve month-gods, revolving as though they were planets. They smile, some churlishly, others beneficently. They nod and spew forth oceans and stars and centuries. With their tongues, they have the power to hypnotize. Directly above her then—I shall see her close her eyes. And behind the eyes of both of us the wonder of Grecian dreams will already be finding support, as if from the grainy cement and the steel girders of this special fortress that we lie against.

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Crossing

Maurice Roche

EACH THE LAST TO BE FIRST AND VICE VERSA: **one beat more, one less..., the ticking (more or less regular but uneven metronomic sequences) rebounds on the pain at different pitches. Sensing the tiny darts shoot from the alarm clock (next to the lamp) on the bedside table, before they burst into showers of sparks, reverberating on the twinges of pain and with it forming a perfect unison, an integrated sum set (transforming it into an even stinging: tick-tock)—pain and ticking confounded both in the tick-tock and in the painful stings. Amplifying it (in the echo chamber of the head), multiplying it in accelerated and disordered pricklings (rapidly evolving microrhythmic units; chain explosions) that,**

scratched out by the sound the nail makes on the map of the town—

diminish into itchings until they disappear, withdrawing into the clock... SILENCE. APPARENTLY MOTIONLESS THE TWO CLOCKHANDS, VERTICALLY MERGED, POINT TOWARD A SHELF TEN INCHES ABOVE THE LITTLE TOKONOMA. ON THE SHELF LIES A GREEN CERAMIC TRAY, A SQUARE TRAY WITH ROUNDED ED-

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GES, CONTAINING THE MODEL OF A JAPANESE SAND GARDEN WHOSE PATHS AND CHANNELS—LANES AND "WATERMARK" GULLEYS, SUGGESTED BY "TORII", ROCKS, AND BRIDGES PLACED AT HYPOTHETICAL INTERSECTIONS (EXACT AND CONTRADICTORY PLACES)—INEVITABLY LEAD TO A TEMPLE SET AMONG BLOSSOMING TREES, IN FRONT OF WHICH STANDS A SHRINE WHERE LIES (EFFIGY IN A GOLDEN KIMONO) A SLEEPING BEAUTY MORE OLD THAN DEAD—SOMEONE TO CULTIVATE IN THE BONE ORCHARD.

HIGH MOON BAZAAR—THE FLEA MARKET OF THE HEART. HERE THERE ARE BARGAINS PASSED BY, THE LUCK OF FORTUNES TOLD: DIDO ON SALE, SALOME SECOND-HAND, ANDROMEDA TEN PERCENT OFF, OPHELIA—BIG SLASH, SCHEHERAZADE... OLD-TALE-SPINNER FOR WAKING SLEEPER.

FROM THE MIDST OF THE JUMBLE IT WAS POSSIBLE TO RECOVER A MUSTY VIOLETSCENTED GLOVE A LOCK OF HAIR SMELLING OF MOTHBALLS A VOICE ON RECORDING TAPE...

BITS AND PIECES FROM WHICH IT WAS NECESSARY TO EXTRACT THE ILL-ASSORTED REMAINS OF VENTURES, FRAGMENTS OF EVERY KIND OF BELONGING. IT MUST BE POSSIBLE TO REASSEMBLE, PIECE BY PIECE, THIS PUZZLE-WOMAN MADE OF ODD BITS. **(No longer aware of it but sensing it in the watermarked grain of the paper:) suffering and (within the texture of the map) invisible (on the surface) nothing—** where I settled down.

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And to help myself doze off, I reassured myself by thinking of a method of suicide.

Could I then loudly "yawn forth the password for the night" to some heir?

He came to see me: "Honorable friend is ill? Under threat of death? Modest doctor must soon return to Tokyo. He would like to bring honorable friend if latter would consent to follow, also to part with his body, his tattooed skin..." He read me press cuttings about himself:

> *... he is the world's greatest expert on the subject of tattooing. He buys the skin of needy workers, removes it when they die, and has it tanned, backed with paper, and mounted on wooden frames. The walls of his dressing-room are lined with skins, mainly those of gangsters, which he examines under a magnifying glass. He knows how to appraise effects of perspective, and the precision of details that are sometimes extraordinarily delicate, standing out from the gray-blue background only by virtue of their yellows, greens, vermilions .....*

"*Humble doctor can pay very high price for tattoo and also ensure honorable friend that last days will be full of peace, very calm, free of material anxieties,*

> *...in Tokyo he has founded a club whose members meet at regular intervals in public baths: colors emerge more vividly after a plunge in*

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scalding water. The traditional Yeddoka bath, at a temperature of 120°, gives tattoos incomparable brilliance.....

if he agrees to come. Thus after death honorable patient will be immortalized in tattoo museum of miserable doctor, in company of the rarest skins: for instance that of magnificent bald Scandinavian, with whole length of back representing admirable naked Negress, front face.

I also wanted something hot: some meat to eat, or a girl.[1]

1. "Happy Christmas, darling!"
coming from the next room; I then made mental note of
— clink of a bottle against a glass
— clicking of an automatic lighter
— quick padding steps; the floorboards creak
— a door op
(ens—sudden gust of a presence in the corridor and:
— old shoes dragging
— a cough
— clanks in the plumbing when the faucet of the sink on the landing is turned on, abrupt tremors..., the liquid spurts by fits and starts
— "... Brrr... Frrr... AHAhaaaa..." the broad's exclamations: inarticulate language under the freezing water, sobs of pain? absurd ejulation
— a door slams
— spasmodic belching of the sink as it drains.)

From the room once again
— quivering of springs in a bed suddenly fallen on
— something drops and breaks—saucer? ashtray?

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all this lost haphazardly now
in random order; and in jumbled, finally shunted (I
intermittent roulades, a gradually lowered the
man's voice, muffled, its volume) to bring back to
words vague; diphthongs my room—the day before?
and vowels scattering in all tomorrow?—to isolate what
directions (indiscernible.) I thought was peculiarly
Confused sequence punc- meant for my ears:
tuated by the exclamation of
the American girl (her whisky voice), brassily:
"Tom cat!... Haaay!..."

"*Doctor will have his sick friend see (and touch if he wishes) this extraordinary curiosity, still alive, acquired only recently, already on way to Japan.*"

I was shaking a little: the bitch had taken my left hand and was passing it over her body. I answered her dopy questions:
... why I wore dark glasses (dark? I'd never thought of that!) For others to see that I could not see.
... how did I judge a woman's beauty?... my sense of touch not yet perfected; I had forgotten that I was a novice not only in blindness... but also...

I didn't know exactly what I was touching—how far I'd got. That made her laugh. I played at guessing... : one material thick, elastic; another, rough. Occasionally, but very quickly, something between fabric and skin, softly scratchy, metallically sleek—somewhat warm nevertheless... **Following an itinerary that outlines the *name that cannot be transcribed?* ...**

The password?

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(To hear her talk, I could make her come back if I discovered what had been traced in these guided "feelings.")

I was alone at present and I searched for this (immemorial) name, which, once expressed—once only—grew faint, vanished; a name forever lost in the mists of time. ***behind which you can pass undetected; a true amnesiac's name, born of the fatigue you would endure pronouncing it (with no prompter to cheat you of it.)***

You will murmur (one syllable or two?), but so low that nothing will reach you of your own words—, or barely spoken, will you have already forgotten them? Since this word would henceforth take the place of a mistress, I intended to write it on (for example) a large sheet of wrapping paper, which I would then put beside me in bed.

A frail palindrome (prick a small hole at the bottom of its V!) that I would caress from bottom to top

(my hand noting the warmth that issues from her curves)

, from top to bottom;

..."von hinten wie von vorne."

"... *the doctor would be heartbroken to let such a fine drawing go. Legendary dragon, yes? running entire length of honorable patient's back. Done by great artist. Perfect design.*" **diagram of an ideal course (one loop, four curves, one loop), unreversible, which one resumes in the opposite direction.**

(: East←West on the map set upside down with the North underneath—imagining therefore going in the opposite direction while returning in one's mind along the same recurrent path)

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—When passing in front of the Post Office one can slip into the mailbox a card punched with the pain of one's choice. Sending it elsewhere: an exotic souvenir to be got rid of. —THERE WERE OTHERS TO REPLACE IT. BUT THIS BODY PERUSED A THOUSAND TIMES, OR A THOUSAND AND ONE TIMES, WAS NOT THE SAME. IT WAS NECESSARY TO RETURN

while going on to the place where one lives, where one is, and where one may be. There, at the intersection marked by a red cross.

Thinking of the house as it appears when one turns into the lane: a one-storey shanty of worm-eaten boards covered here and there with flaking tar. One first notices, projecting from the housefront, the terrace supported by T-shaped posts; a little stair (two or three steps?) gives access to it. When on the terrace, one can push open the half-shut entrance door; a wooden ladder rises steeply from the entrance to a narrow landing.

On the right, a door.

Imagining it as a bookcover. Nothing is yet inscribed on it: neither the title nor the author's name!

The ornamental box of the lock is patterned after the clasp of a gospel-book.

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I had picked up a volume on the bedside table

published by the Institute for Blind Youngsters. **Opening the...** I was expecting (the doctor or the woman next door.) I was afraid. **(Being sure, when alone, neither of one's dreams nor of reality.)** I hectically leafed through the big tome. I passed my moist hands over its pages, I felt the vibration of the raised characters, the "salient points," little dominoes for a game without meaning or utility: what I was reading: "The room is oblong—some thirty feet in length and twenty-five in breadth..." (...) "One mirror—and this is not a very large one—is visible. In shape it is nearly circular—and it is hung so that a reflection of the person can be obtained from it....."

Pressing the light switch:

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It's automatic so it doesn't work.
Trying the lighter (turning the flint around and around but it doesn't strike—to hell with it!)
Still in the dark.
Conscious of lying on the bed while approaching it slowly. Returning to one's self.
Drawing everything back to one's self; becoming one with one's own body, shutting one's self up.

I was alongside my own carcass, incapable of pulling myself together. Now that my reading (the imprint of writing) had fallen to pieces, I untiringly went back over the sentences again and again. OVER THE OUTLINES OF A FACE THAT COULD BE DAMAGED BY DINT OF A WORN-OUT GAZE.

While entering one's skin, vanishing far away. Heading for the Chinese quarter. Fading. *You will lose sight of*

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yourself. Disappearing behind a building at a turning of the street to reappear in the entrance of a blind alley lying perpendicular to the street that is contiguous to the market-square, there glimpsing the "Bazaar" at last.
Thinking of the house used as bazaar, "a one-storey shanty of worm-eaten boards covered here and there with flaking tar."

Being drawn to this shop, where one can find everything one desires—what one hasn't got, (what one has once owned?)—the mass-produced pen to throw away after use, the lighter that can be replaced by another identical in appearance...

The permanent if unsuspected memento mori: the lost object (which one does not remember) always replaced by its likeness, which resembles thousands of others, and which is not the same.

There are women too. Enough to make a jumble sale: real ones and fake ones. "For example, in this store they sell a gadget, a Japanese toy for grown men: a woman made of flexible plastic, folded up in a box no larger than a pack of cigarettes. (Pocket Woman.)" She is 5 ft. long unfolded. She has to be blown up: the result is a woman that can be used for a while provided she is well taken care of. ("...after use the pocket woman should be cleansed thoroughly in water, using a

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mild soap, rinsed and carefully dried. The pocket woman should be dusted with talcum powder, and kept in its container. The pocket woman should never be boiled." After being used several times, she is given the kiss-off.

"All the famous women in creation have been reduced to the same size. No name is mentioned on the wrapper. It is kept as a surprise."

Having only been able ("they are very dear") to purchase one of them, kept in readiness on a sofa, dressed in a red sarong with gold patterns. One shuts one's eyes to imagine it. One contemplates her frequently in this manner. ON IT HAD BEEN INCISED CERTAIN SIGNS OF DETERIORATION THAT SPEEDED UP THE WORK OF TIME. THERE WERE STIGMATA THAT HAD TO BE AGGRAVATED TO ACHIEVE SEPARATION FROM HER, WHO EVEN MORE DEAD THAN OLD...

I dreaded the medic's arrival (his verdict?), he would be coming to claim me as his property.

I had, at his request

> *THIRTY YEARS OF PATIENCE*
> *A UNIQUE COLLECTION*
> *...If in the street he encounters a tattoo not quite dead, he follows it, calculating his chances of becoming its owner*

, made out a will:

NIGHT AFTER NIGHT THERE WERE STORIES TO TELL HER: HER LIFE, INVENTORIES AND INVENTIONS... ALL THOSE WHO HAD BEHELD HER.

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THERE WERE ALSO LETTERS

: "MY LOVE, I kept writing the same thing, ***(will you be aware of it?)***

You will have gone back to bed. Your right hand will now continue its patterns in a void (will you try to find a path of emptiness through the arabesques of this nocturnal chironomy?)

Staring at the outlines of the plastic woman stretched out on the sofa. One tries several times: imperceptibly this "neum" turns into the beat of a song

("Ahué, ahué, a vahiné Tahiti
Arané tané antié.....")

that comes in gusts, between which are interpolated the whinings of insects—the miniverse of the "naonaos," restless and far away. The frenzied dance of these tiny creatures seems incomprehensible, a dance that is deduced from the sounds one perceives; a dance that is supposed to be a kind of language and that, if certain experts are to be believed, is not only a replica of the Maori celebrations that fill the nights of Papeete with squalor but a reconstruction in miniature of the various ways around the island and recalls

NEARBY, BUT MOTIONLESS, TO THE LEFT OF THE JAPANESE GARDEN, THIS MODEL OF AN EARTHQUAKE IN (APPARENTLY) TANGLED BRASS WIRE: SET ON A SHORT VERTICAL STEM THAT DESCENDS FROM THE CENTER OF GRAVITY TO A LITTLE BLACK PIEDOUCHE IN THE FORM OF A TRUNCATED CONE, WHOSE BASE RESTS ON A DISC-SHAPED, SLIGHTLY CONCAVE PLATE. THE WHOLE THING

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IS TWO INCHES HIGH AND THE "RUMPLE" ITSELF FOUR INCHES FROM TIP TO TIP. ON THE PLATE, REALLY A KIND OF SAUCER, A LABEL IS PASTED:

TRAJECTORY OF AN EARTHQUAKE
OBSERVED IN TOKYO, AT MIDNIGHT, ON...

THE COILS OF BRASS WIRE TRACE THE (MAGNIFIED) COURSE OF A POINT OF THE EARTH'S SURFACE DURING THE SEISM. THE WIRE IS WOUND MANY TIMES ABOUT ITSELF; NUMBERED INDICATORS (FROM 1 TO 1) MARK THE PROGRESSION OF THE UNDULATORY WAVE, ACCORDING TO THE EVOLUTION OF THE PHENOMENON; but nothing budged on the volume of Braille, where moving to and fro among the raised symbols, I scratched perfunctorily with the tip of my nail, cecograph for a vanished text: ("item, I bequeath my body after death to the Japanese doctor...") *He promised money: "... he will remit it in instalments to honorable patient: one third as advance when the contract is signed,*

. . . . . .

and the final third on delivery, that is, on decease—money useful for funeral expenses."

I was only alive (how could I forget it?) because my body no longer belonged to me, the skin I wanted so much to save.

"*Doctor will examine its details at leisure with a magnifying glass, carefully distinguishing them. He will wander—he will journey among the turnings, the curves that are the movements of light on these colors—once he takes possession of the masterpiece. That is why, although looking forward to death of honorable friend, he can contribute miserable allowance (the second third) until it expires...*

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"Kind patient must have confidence: doctor is rich, very. His fortune is far away, many many miles of course, out of reach. But the doctor will disclose a portion of it... against security needless to say... bequest for sick friend."

He was unable to offer more. There were expenses: skinning, tanning, dressing, stretching, mounting the skin on a wooden panel... "He knows all about it—Demanding and expensive work... exclusive of expenses incurred by processing for preservation of fine tattoo... nor does he count—they are given as a bonus—considerations."

I thought about a conclusion, the crucial word of the story: last words? the traditional "Mehr Licht!" If I found this exact "crossword"—the precise term?—

Translated by Harry Mathews

"Crossing" is an excerpt from *Compact*, ©Editions du Seuil.

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John Wieners

He's not here
no one's here

I'm shaking from another man
but remembering beating you
on Sunday evening for
leaving me alone over
the weekend, subjecting you

to torture every time you fail
to honor your invitation of
between classes concern

bringing me to the dam and
presenting yourself as basin
to a word uttered three years ago,
impatient to act, unable to turn off
because of the highway, in haste rejecting
your suggestion, "I know a motel,"
coming to my room instead, prone amid sheets
taking off my shirt and socks, the ghost
of Rudolf clinging to my limbs, hearing
this afternoon your scream from prayer
as I lay down beside you, only to have a
foreign influence invade our desire
force you through the hall to presume
betrayal and revenge because you use
the security of disharmony as a weapon,
a tool to enter my naivete
and assume my ecstasie, when what you
receive turns out a beating.

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Advice

for Gordon Baldwin

A pleasant meadow
where sleeping maids lay
one cousin awakes

to open gates
for Beth to arrive
who has nowhere to go

guarded by gargoyles
and a poison enemy
the meadow, unsafe

holds my family.

"Run away with peasants,
you dont belong here
too bold hands hurt

to swell the innocent sleep
of lassies and lads,
penmen and petticoats,

ignored by traffic's cutthroats,
unwanted elsewhere, intruding
with aged whiggery."

No home on the grass, the maidens
arise to return inside
with their new friend,

Beth, who does not appreciate
shrill, wet, mildewed,
damp ridicule of her

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rooted devotions, learned
from Charles and Mary Lamb,
or the tough-minded neighbor

roustabouts they have,
racing and shouting, ducking
and filling her favorite

flourishes with guilt and un-
easy shame. She rushes
in a pout to tell her be-

loved scrivener of such rude
behavior, loud mouths and
coarse flesh. Poor

and starving, there is nothing
he can do, but suggests she
leave the country for inter-

national manners, less
harsh, perhaps by a river
she may find some climate

more to her taste, a condition
suited in her quest for quiet.
"They say in China, the populace

more peaceful, the children
graceful, in Manchuria or
Mongolia the murrain

might yield a bounteous
touch in your tribulation
of seeking to rid yourself

of devils soaring through our valleys.
"We will go and seek."
Be sure to remember

and hold fast the search
for brotherhood, friends, thus finally
his face, your own.

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Paul II

The faces of children
encourage deeds
of innocence

to take up arms
against eastern
indulgence

forced from slumber
to admit the falsehood
of goodness age reveals

Caviar Tears

no one to dine with
no one to smoke with
no one to wine with
no one to choke with

in a boarding house bed

forgotten restaurants
a darkened dining room
shuttered for winter
on a forest's hill
perhaps closes the wound
of anticipation under thin cloths
of appetite

no one to gag with
no one to bleed with
no one to leave with
no one to wake with

from deep sleep hands on my throat

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James Koller

Four Poems

I

We change to keep all else the same

Crows fill the tree, get up
one by one, heavy, together
swing black across the blue
settle, one by one
together, fill the leafless tree

I burn six candles
white candles on a white plate

Six deer, dark in the snow, their heads
turned to me, & hawks
wheel above, blue sky
the deer do not move

Your hair has turned to Magpie feathers

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II

Mars, opalescent orange, McIbbon's crystal ball
reflects fire light
the sheen of ten brass shells whirring
she swings them over her very blond head

we dance as the moon disappears
howl & hoot dance drum
the orange moon disappears

she asks for a boy but I
bring none
she asks for a girl but I
only smile
she writhes on her back
comes & comes
hears us

we fuck in high oat grass
children in a circle around us

"Here the world ends, here
it begins. I fly between. Bring word
after the beginning, before the end."

wide wings thru dark trees

all that he could catch of her was white light
& the black behind

owl, just returned from the dead

"I wasn't really there"

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III

I crawled over the dark ground
planting squash, an owl
over my shoulder, the moon

she throws back her head, stretches
her arms hands, ripple of muscle
skin, the moon

clouds, shadows
between us
the ground mostly lighted

the flower first, fruit
full & rounded
the softest curve, ripple, moon

the laughter very soft

"I get crazy in the full moon"

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IV

Snow on Mt. St. Helena

Billy riding Toby driving
I hope the road be good
rain in my face
I hope their road be good

there were three angels in Valley Ford
five more & a girl at the crossroads to Tomales
& four gassed up at Point Reyes Station, roared away
chrome & hair catching sunlight, to the north
to join the others

to Oregon, as per
I Ching, The Book of Changes

going thru changes

like music

harmoniously, minor dischords
like she burned or threw away everything, always
burns her bridges
pulled the old light out of the ceiling
tore the wires loose, all connections

change gears

angels at every turn
all crossed roads

both sides, the street lined with Harleys, choppers
of every description

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he opened her coat
& holding it open
carefully & with expert eye
examined
what she had to offer
so to speak, as it were

a whole world
& nothing ever dies, it's all here
on every road, behind every tree
growing out of the ground, a beautiful
fire, flames

I'm grinning

exhaust, carbon

diamonds, & threads
my mind is filled with diamonds & threads

I am going off in all directions, thru intersections &
crossed roads

a necklace to live in

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Jack Collom

Going Downtown to Buy Some Pills

The big yellow house
up the hill a blue-green house
across a gray house
next door a white house
right a small white house
left a flat-roofed gray house
further a red house with a radio shop
next the Brass Rail (white)
right a white house
left a green grocery store
right on the corner a 1700 small white house
  Here Ann S. Stevens born 1810
ahead a red house
a weeping willow
right a white house with a cement-block fence
left a white house
six cats crossing the street
right a white house
next a white house
left a white house
right a white house
left a white house
next a light blue, white and blue house
right a gray barn
  with one pane of six in the high window
left a small red-trimmed gray house
right bushes
spruce and boulders
left the creek
next a gray house

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next a green house
right a white Russian clubhouse
a yellow house
a bridge
a waterfall
a dull orange house
a gray house
a gray house
stores, the new highway
more stores

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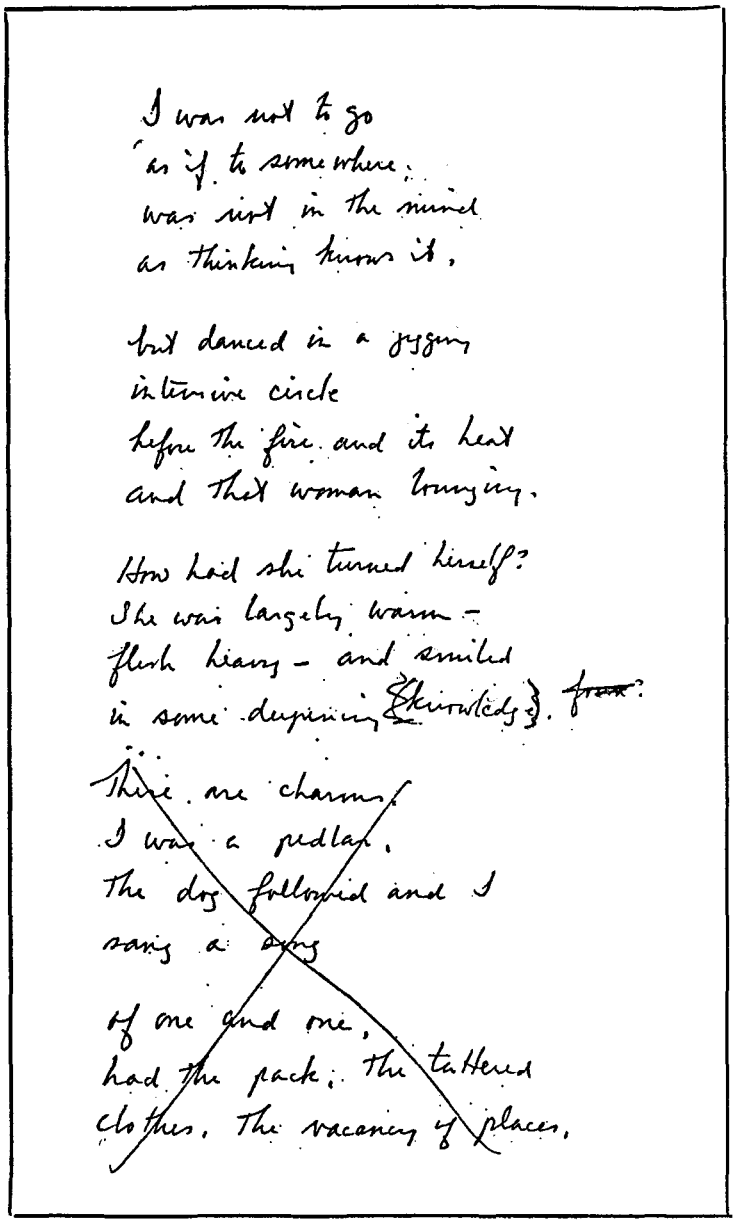
I was not to go
as if to somewhere.
was not in the mind
as thinking knows it,

but danced in a jogging
intensive circle
before the fire and its heat
and that woman lounging.

How had she turned herself?
She was largely warm —
flesh heavy — and smiled
in some despising [knowledge]. ~~from~~

There are charms.
I was a pedlar.
The dog followed and I
sang a song

of one and one,
had the pack. The tattered
clothes. The vacancy of places.

Manuscript page of "The Finger"

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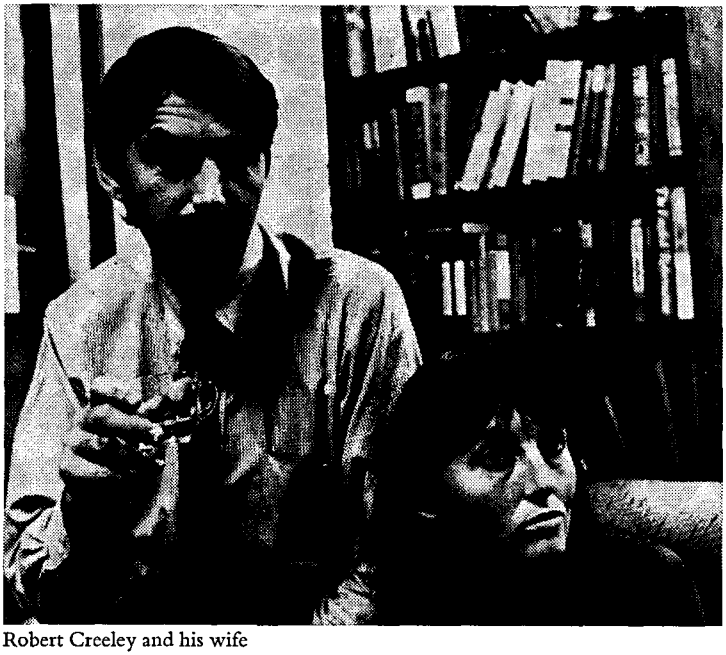
The Art of Poetry X

Robert Creeley



Robert Creeley and his wife

This is a composite interview. It combines two separate discussions with Robert Creeley—held at different times, and conducted by two different interviewers: Linda Wagner and Lewis MacAdams, Jr. The questions specifically devoted to the poet's craft were put to Robert Creeley by Linda Wagner. She refers to the exchange as a colloquy—*a term that Creeley insisted on because (as he put it) her questions were "active in their own assumptions... we are talking together." She began the exchange at the 1963 Vancouver poetry sessions and continued at Creeley's 1964 Bowling Green, Ohio,*

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reading, and in New Mexico, August 1965, at the poet's home there.

Most of the portion of the interview dealing with Creeley's personal life, his childhood, his involvement with artists, and the Black Mountain group, was added subsequently—the material drawn from discussions between Creeley and Lewis MacAdams, a poet now living in California. MacAdams interviewed Creeley in the spring of 1968 in Eden, New York, a few miles from Buffalo where Creeley spends the winter months teaching. MacAdams wrote the following observations: "The first session was a failure. Both of us were tired, and although Creeley was polite and voluble, I asked a bunch of dumb questions. The interview ended in the dark, everybody morose and slightly drunk. Then we adjourned to his driveway to shovel snow. We tried again two weeks later. The snow had stopped, the sun was out, and the Creeley house was full of his friends, among them the poets Allen Ginsberg, Robert Duncan, and Robin Blaser. After breakfast the two of us went upstairs to his study, a big sunny room looking out across a long wooded valley to Lake Erie... the study had once been a nursery, and the framed photographs of Charles Olson and John Wieners, and Creeley's wife, Bobbie, are set off by a pink wallpaper, covered with horses and with maids. On one of his bookshelves is a tiny piece of sculpture by John Chamberlain."

Robert Creeley was born in 1926 in Arlington, Massachusetts. His works include Le Fou, The Immoral Proposition, The Kind Of Act Of, All That Is Lovely In Men, If You, Words, A Form of Women *(all volumes of poetry)*; The Gold Diggers, *a collection of stories, and* The Island, *a novel.*

INTERVIEWER

What do you think was the first impulse that set you on the course to being a writer?

CREELEY

As a kid I used to be fascinated by people who, like they say, "traveled light." My father died when I was very young, but there were things of his left in the house which my

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mother kept as evidences of his life: his bag, for example, his surgical instruments, even his prescription pads. These things were not only relics of his person, but what was interesting to me was that this instrumentation was peculiarly contained in this thing that he could carry in his hand. The doctor's "bag." One thinks of the idiom which is so current now, "bag," to be in this or that "bag." The doctor's bag was an absolutely explicit instance of something you carry with you and work out of. As a kid, growing up without a father, I was always interested in men who came to the house with specific instrumentation of that sort—carpenters, repairmen—and I was fascinated by the idea that you could travel in the world that way with all that you needed in your hands... a Johnny Appleseed. All of this comes back to me when I find myself talking to people about writing. The scene is always this: "What a great thing! To be a writer! Words are something you can carry in your head. You can really 'travel light.' "

INTERVIEWER

You speak a great deal about the poet's locale, his place, in your work. Is this a geographic term, or are you thinking of an inner sense of being?

CREELEY

I'm really speaking of my own sense of place. Where "the heart finds rest," as Robert Duncan would say. I mean that place where one is open, where a sense of defensiveness or insecurity and all the other complexes of response to place can be finally dropped. Where one feels an intimate association with the ground under foot. Now that's obviously an idealization—or at least to hope for such a place may well be an idealization—but there are some places where one feels the possibility more intensely than others. I, for example, feel much more comfortable in a small town. I've always felt so, I think, because I grew up in one in New England. I like that spill of life all around, like the spring you get in New England with that crazy water, the trickles of water every-

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place, the moisture, the shyness, and the particularity of things like bluejays. I like the rhythms of seasons, and I like the rhythms of a kind of relation to ground that's evident in, say, farmers; and I like time's accumulations of persons. I loved aspects of Spain in that way, and I frankly have the same sense of where I now am living in New Mexico. I can look out the window up into hills seven miles from where the Sandia Cave is located, perhaps the oldest evidence of man's occupation of this hemisphere. I think it dates back to either 15,000 or 20,000 B.C. and it's still there. And again I'm offered a scale, with mountains to the southeast, the Rio Grande coming through below us to the west, and then that wild range of mesa off to the west. This is a very basic place to live. The dimensions are of such size and of such curious eternity that they embarrass any assumption that man is the totality of all that is significant in life. The area offers a measure of persons that I find very relieving and much more securing to my nature than would be, let's say, the accumulations of men's intentions and exertions in New York City. So locale is both a geographic term and the inner sense of being.

INTERVIEWER

Do you credit any one writer—ancestor or contemporary—with a strong influence on your poetry?

CREELEY

I think Williams gave me the largest example. But equally I can't at all ignore Charles Olson's very insistent influence upon me both in early times and continuingly. And Louis Zukofsky's. The first person who introduced me to writing as a craft, who even spoke of it as a craft, was Ezra Pound. I think it was my twentieth birthday that my brother-in-law took me down to a local bookstore in Cambridge and said, "What would you like? Would you like to get some books?" I bought *Make It New* and that book was a revelation to me. Pound spoke of writing from the point of view of what writing itself was, not what it was "about." Not what

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symbolism or structure had led to, but how a man might address himself to the *act* of writing. And that was the most moving and deepest understanding I think I have ever gained. So that Pound was very important to my craft, no matter how much I may have subsequently embarrassed him by my own work. So many, many people—Robert Duncan, Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, Paul Blackburn, Ed Dorn. I could equally say Charlie Parker—in his uses of silence, in his rhythmic structure. His music was influential at one point. So that I can't make a hierarchy of persons.

INTERVIEWER

How about communicating with other writers when you were beginning?

CREELEY

I started writing to Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams about a magazine I was involved in. That's how I got up courage to write them. I would have been too shy just to write them and say, "I think you are a great man." To have business with them gave me reason. Pound wrote specifically, but he tended to write injunctions— "You do this. You do that. Read this. Read that."

INTERVIEWER

Did you do everything he said?

CREELEY

I tried to. I couldn't do it all. He would send books at times which would be useful. *The History of Money* by Alexander Del Mar, which I read, and thought about. He was very helpful. It was very flattering to be taken at all seriously by him. Williams was always much more specific. At times he would do things which would... not *dismay* me, —but my own ego would be set back. I remember one time I wrote him a very stern letter—some description about something I was going to do, or *this* was the way things were, *blah blah*. And he returned me the sheets of the letter

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and he had marked on the margin of particular sections, "Fine. Your style is tightening." But I had the sense to know such comments were of more use to me than whether or not he approved of what I had to say. He would do things like that which were very good. While Pound would say, "Would you please tell me how old you are? You refer to having been involved in something for forty years. Are you twenty-three, or sixty-three?"

INTERVIEWER

At this point, were you raising pigeons in the country?

CREELEY

As a kid I'd had poultry, pigeons and chickens and what not. I'd married in 1946 and after a year on Cape Cod, we moved to a farm in New Hampshire where I attempted so-called sustenance farming. We had no ambitions that this would make us any income. We had a small garden that gave us produce for canning. It made the form of a day very active and interesting, something continuing—feed them, pluck them, take care of them in various ways. And I met a lovely man, a crazy, decisive breeder of Barred Rocks. He was quite small, almost elfin in various ways, with this crazy, intense, and beautifully articulate imagination. He could *douse* for example, and all manner of crazy, mystical businesses that he took as comfortably as you'd take an ax in hand. No dismay, or confusion at all. A neighbor in New Hamsphire would lose money in the woods. So he'd just cut a birch wand, and find it. The same way you'd turn on the lights to see what you're doing. I remember one of these neighbors of ours, Howard Ainsworth, a woodcutter, was cutting pulp in the woods on a snowy day. But he had a hole in his pocket, and by the time he had discovered it, he'd lost a pocketful of change. So Howard simply cut himself a birch stick and he found it. It was nearly total darkness in the woods. He only remarked upon it, that is, how he'd found it, as an explanation of *how* he'd found it. I mean, it never occurred to him that it was more extraordinary than that.

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INTERVIEWER

How did it occur to you?

CREELEY

I was fascinated by it—because it was a kind of "mysticism" which was so extraordinarily practical and unremoved. He had this crazy, yet practical way of exemplifying what he knew as experience. He used to paint, for example. Once he showed me this picture of a dog. He said, "What do you think of this? It's one of my favorite dogs." It was this white and black dog standing there looking incredibly sick. And I said, "Well, it's a nice picture. But." And he said, "Yes, it died three days later. That's why it looks so sick." He delighted me, you know, and I felt much more at home with him than with the more—not sophisticated—because I don't think any man was more sophisticated in particular senses than he, but, God, he talked about things you could actually put your hand on. He would characterize patience, or how to pay attention to something.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think you work better in the isolated places you seem to frequent—in New Hampshire, Mallorca, New Mexico?

CREELEY

That seems to be my habit, although having been a teacher for some years I can make it with a number of people and find a place with them. But my dilemma, so to speak, as a younger man, was that I always came on too strong with people I casually met. I remember one time, well, several times, I tended to go for broke with particular people. As soon as I found access to someone I really was attracted by—not only sexually, but in the way they were—I just wanted to, literally, to be utterly with them. I found myself absorbing their way of speaking. I just wanted to get in them. And some people, understandably, would feel this was pretty damned exhausting—to have someone hanging on, you

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know, like coming at you. I didn't have any experience of how it was really affecting the other person. I mean, I think that a lot of my first wife's understandable bitterness about our relationship was the intensity that she was having to deal with. I mean everything was so intense and involved always with tension. My way to experience emotion was to tighten it up as much as possible, and not even wittingly. Just "naturally." Allen Ginsberg makes a remark that when I get to town nobody sleeps till I'm gone. I can't let anybody sleep because I don't want to miss anything. I want it all, and so I tend at times, understandably, to exhaust my friends —keep pushing, pushing, pushing. Not like social pushing to make a big noise, but you know, I don't want to miss it. I love it. I so love the intensity of people that I can't let anything stop until it's literally exhaustion.

INTERVIEWER

I've heard a lot of stories about your fighting in those earlier days.

CREELEY

That's when the confusions of how to be with people became so heightened I would just spill. It had to do with drinking, which I did a lot of in those days. And pot. We were smoking pot pretty continuously by about... let's see... I first had use of marijuana in India, where I was in the American Field Service. We were in a barracks at one point— about forty men, all ages. I think almost everyone in that barracks was turned on almost all day long. We were in Central India. There was literally nothing to do. It was an incredibly awkward climate for us. I mean it was very hot and so we'd sit there sweating—drinking was impossible— and getting very damned sick. I had a friend from Southern California who suggested one day that there was an alternative. He said, "Try this." There was nothing mystical. It was very, like, "Here, have an aspirin." So the barracks switched and everything became very delightful. The food was instantly palatable and life became much more interest-

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ing. So much so that I remember returning from England on the Queen Elizabeth and this friend and I continued smoking a lot of pot on ship. In fact, we used to go into the toilet. A lot of people depended on this toilet, and he and I would get in there and turn on, then sort of sit around. Outside there'd be this great mass of people standing and waiting, banging to get in there. They thought we were homosexuals—a consideration aided by the fact that one night, I remember, I staggered back into the room where there were these tiers of bunks, and trying to get into my bunk I climbed into the wrong one. We used to get up on the boat deck too, which was restricted. That North Atlantic—it was absolutely silent and isolated, seeing that whole sea in a beautiful full moon. Just beautiful.

INTERVIEWER

You were talking about fighting.

CREELEY

Well see, with drinking I had the sense I was drinking in the frustration of social ineptness. Even to this day if I drink—I mean up to a point it's extremely pleasant and relieving and relaxing for me—there comes an inevitable point where my whole feeling turns into irritation, frustration, and that's when I fight. I mean, I don't think I ever fought anyone except in that condition—fighting out of just sheer frustration and a feeling of absolute incompetence and inability. Also people seemed very belligerent during the forties and fifties. We used to get into these ridiculous fights.

INTERVIEWER

I heard you had a fight with Jackson Pollock once.

CREELEY

Yes, a great meeting. Because he obviously was having the same problem I was, intensively, with a vengeance. I'd been in the Cedar Bar talking with Franz Kline, and another friend of Kline's, and Fielding Dawson probably was there. We

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were sitting over at a corner booth, and they were talking and drinking in a kind of relaxed manner. But I, again, you know, very characteristic of me, I was all keyed up with the conversation and I'd start to run to get the beer, or whatever we were drinking, and it wasn't coming fast enough. I'd go up to the bar, have a quick drink, and return to the table and pick up the drink that by then had come, and I was getting awfully lushed, and excited, and listening, and I was up at the bar getting another drink, when the door swings open and in comes this very, you know, very *solid* man, this very particular man, again, with this intensity. He comes up to the bar, and almost immediately he made some gesture that bugged me. Something like putting his glass on the bar close to mine, that kind of business where he was pushing me just by *being there*. So I was trying to re-assert my place. The next thing we knew we were swinging at each other. And I remember this guy John, one of the owners, just put his hand on the bar and vaulted, literally, right over the bar, right between us, and he said, like, "Okay, you guys," and he started pushing at both of us, whereupon, without even thinking, we both zeroed in on him, and he said, like, "Come on now, cut it out." Then he said, "Do you two guys know each other?" And so then he introduced us, and—God! It was Jackson Pollock! So I was showing him pictures of my children and he was saying, "I'm their godfather." Instantly affable, you know. We were instantly very friendly. And he was very good to me. In those days, I remember, in the Cedar Bar, I had a big wooden-handled clasp knife, that in moments of frustration and rage—I mean I never stuck anybody with it, but it was, like I'd get that knife out, you know, and I don't think I tried to scare people with it, but it was like, when all else failed, that knife was... not simply in the sense I was going to kill somebody, like a gun, but I *loved* that knife. You could carve things with it, make things and so on. And so, I'd apparently been flourishing it in the bar at some point, and I remember he took it away from me, John did, and he kept it and said you're not going to have this knife for two weeks. And then he finally said, "Look,

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you can't come in here any more," and I said, like, "What am I gonna do? Where am I gonna go?" So he would finally let me in if I drank ginger ale only. Because I used to stand out front and look in the window. Then he would let me come in and sit, as long as I was a good boy and drank only ginger ale. And finally he let me have the knife back, because that knife was very—well, I've still got one like it.

INTERVIEWER

When you first took LSD did you have any problem?

CREELEY

I had a momentary one, when I remember at one point I did enter the dualism which is "yes—no," that binary factor. I felt it was going to be absolutely awful. I had just said something such as "this is the case" and I suddenly had an intensive experience of "this is the case—this is *not* the case—this *is* the case..." It was like seeing a vast checkerboard—that kind of alternating situation. Then I just, by grace of something, stepped out of it. Just stepped out. In the second experience with it, last summer, blessedly that never occurred. All through that second LSD experience I had Donovan's "There is a Mountain." I had a pleasant younger friend, and we'd taken it about two in the morning. We had a fire burning, and we were in a place in New England. The day broke clear and fresh and dewy, and there was all this moisture in the trees and the grass—these spider webs of moisture, and it was just idyllic. The whole tone of the house changed. The children had obviously neither concern nor interest nor knowledge that we were on LSD, but somehow the feeling went through the whole house, so that the girls walked down to a store, maybe a mile away, and bought us a chocolate cake. They also spent about an hour and a half that morning making a necklace of pine cones which they gave Bobbie, my wife. The cats and our dog were, you know, almost ravenous for us. The cats were crawling all over us. It wasn't just our hallucinating and thinking they were; they were with us every moment—

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intensively, rubbing up against us and purring. Then the fire in the fireplace, that light, beautiful light; then seeing the dawn come up back of us as the room began to transform into the day.... So that "The Finger" is directly, you know, that information. I remember the business of this beautiful, primordial experience of woman, in the guise of my wife; but equally her image floating between the moments of birth—as girl-child to the most crone-like, the most haggish. Just crazily—all the guises of woman. All that Robert Graves, for example, in rather didactic fashion tries to say is the case. I mean, he's right, certainly he's right. But it's not a hierarchy. It's an absolute manifestation throughout all realms of existence in this woman figure, and yet that woman is woman. She's unequivocally woman. It was absolutely delightful. I thus "jiggled a world before her made of my mind" and I thought, that's the delight.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think is the effect of hallucinatory drugs on the creative process?

CREELEY

Terrific! That's at least what I'd like to say. Things had been so up tight, almost for a year—writing, really our marriage as well, just a stale sense of effort and also confusions of feeling older. I think a lot, and at times I can box myself in with all the rationale of army logistics. It can get to be a hopeless log jam. So anyhow the LSD just wiped that out—and fears and tentativenesses and senses of getting lost or of being endlessly separated from the world, all that just went. I can't claim perhaps so simply that writing was thereby opened but I do know the past year has felt a very active one in consequence. The thing is, it's *information*—extraordinary and deeply *relieving* information. Just as if one were to hear that the war was over, that some imminent peril and/or bitter waste of time had *stopped*. Of course, there's no need to be told this over and over; that is, I don't myself feel much need to take the drug every day. It's a vision of

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a life, *all* life—and obviously that's a lot to be given by anything or anyone, and so one's not done with it, so to speak, in a day.

INTERVIEWER

When did your interest in painting start?

CREELEY

Well, through Pound's agency I'd come to know René Laubiès, who translated some of Pound's *Cantos* into French. The first published translation of them into French. And Laubiès was an active and interesting painter. In fact, I saw the first Jackson Pollock I ever really saw in Paris at his gallery, Paul Fachetti's gallery. Up to then my relationships had been primarily with other writers. But I liked Laubiès extremely. It wasn't really the painting as something done that interested me. It was the painter, or the activity of painting I was really intrigued by. About that time I began to look at things. And then, because I was an American living in Europe, having left the New Hampshire farm, I was particularly intrigued by the Americanism of certain painters, like Pollock, obviously, and other friends, like Ashley Bryan, and particularly John Altoon, who becomes very, very important to me because his energies were made so incredibly manifest in his work—images of my own reality so to speak. And then Guston was extremely good to me. I mean, he was very good to me in the sense that he was generous with his interest and time. I was fascinated by the condition of life these guys had. Not simply that they were drinking all the time, but that they were loners and peculiarly American, specifically American in their ways of experiencing activity, with energy a *process*—like Pollock's "When I am *in* my painting." Duncan in his notes on *Maximus* makes very clear the relation to painting that he'd felt in San Francisco with the group there—Clyfford Still and Diebenkorn and the whole roster of painters he had as friends. In writing, everything was still argued with traditional or inherited attitudes and forms. And then in the middle 50's, the painters, without

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any question, became very decisive for me personally. And not only for me. I was thinking about this when I saw John Ashbery the other day. At one point Ashbery gave his own sense of the New York School. He said, "Well, first of all, the one thing that we were all in agreement with was that there should be no program, and that the poem, as we imagined it, should be the possibility of everything we have as experience. There should be no limit of a programmatic order." And then he went on to qualify why painters were interesting to them. Simply that the articulation—the range of possibility—in painting was more viable to their sense of things. And I thought, "That's literally what I would say." That's precisely the imagination of the activity I had. All of us are now roughly in our early 40's, and what's striking is that each one of us used precisely the same grid of initial experience and proposal. John was obviously coming to it by way of the French Surrealists, where he found, not only playfulness, but a very active admission of the world as it's felt and confronted. It came from other places, too. I was finding it in jazz, for example. And that's why Charlie Parker and Miles Davis and Thelonius Monk and those people were extraordinarily interesting to me. Simply that they seemed to have only the nature of the activity as limit. Possibly they couldn't change water into stone. But then again, maybe they could. That's what was intriguing.

INTERVIEWER

Well, when did you start writing about painters?

CREELEY

I wrote a note about Laubiès for the first issue of the *Black Mountain Review*, which I think is the first note of that order I wrote. Then through the association with Black Mountain, I became very intrigued by Guston and by the visual, what's seen in the world and how all that can be a complex. I'd been so involved with the economy of words, the experience of sound and rhythm, that suddenly it was like having things open again. I wasn't in any sense knowledgeable as to whether

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this scene had some continuity historically. Nor could I use the vocabulary of the usual art critic. But I could, in Olson's sense, give testament, bear witness to this, to extend an invitation to come. You can see the relevance. We were making things. Not only of our own imagination, which was after all finally the point, but we were making things in the materials particular to our own experience of things, just as John Chamberlain was experiencing the materials in *his* world, namely those car parts, and seeing how the imagination might articulate that experience. I was trying to make do with the vocabulary in terms of experience in *my* world. Neither one of us had history. I remember Duncan, a lovely moment when we first met—he and Jess and Harry Jacoby had come to Mallorca. I was in a rather dense and difficult time in my marriage. Ann was away for some reason—down in the city shopping. We lived in a little house outside of the city. You got there by a trolley and the four of us were going back into the city to find them a *pension* where they could stay. We were standing in this trolley with all the people banging around us. I remember Robert—we were all standing holding straps and he looked—turned to me at one point and says, "You're not interested in history, are you?" I kept saying, "Well, I ought to be. And I want to be. But I guess I'm not. You know, I'd *like* to be but, no, that's probably true." That history, as a form of experience, is truly not something I've been able to be articulate with, nor finally engaged by. Art may be, as Williams might say, the *fact* of something, but I did not have that alternative experience of accepting it as part of a historical progression in time.

INTERVIEWER

Would you describe something of the Black Mountain poets—Olson, Duncan, and the others—and something of those days?

CREELEY

I was first in touch with Olson by way of Vincent Ferrini. That is, Vincent was a friend of Cid Corman, and it really

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is Cid's magazine *Origin*, started in Boston in the early 50's, that makes the center for all the subsequent "Black Mountain school." I didn't meet Olson until I went to teach at Black Mountain in 1954—which job saved my life in many ways, and certainly changed it altogether. Living in Mallorca, despite the ease and beauty of the place, I'd begun to feel I was literally good for nothing—so Olson's offer of a job, and equally his giving me the magazine to edit, changed that subject completely.

By the time I got to the college, things were pretty tight. There can't have been more than twenty or twenty-five students, and every day it seemed was a kind of last ditch stand. I remember at one point there was the possibility of some wealthy man in some place like Charleston sending his mentally deficient son to us for the benefits of a college education in exchange for a donation—and after much soul searching, we agreed. He was to give us word of his own agreement by having a plane fly over the college, god knows why—but anyhow we spent at least three days, all of us, wandering around the place with eyes to the sky. I do remember the damn plane never showed up.

There was another fund raising business that consisted of Stefan Wolpe, with me as secretary, writing letters to people like the Guggenheims and Doris Duke—which Stefan would begin with, "I bet you got a lot of money lying around you don't know what to do with," and I'd then try to turn it into socially appropriate English. But nothing ever came of that either—except for one of the Guggenheims, who'd apparently just inherited another bag of gold, sending Stefan a check for ten dollars with a note saying when her affairs were more in order, she'd try to do better. De Kooning one time made a lovely remark about it all, to wit, "The only trouble with Black Mountain is, if you go there, they want to give it to you."

But for me it was all a revelation, and the people were terrific. For example, it was there I met Ed Dorn, Mike Rumaker, Dan Rice and many, many others. Jonathan Williams I'd met earlier in Mallorca, and Fee Dawson was

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then in the army in Stuttgart—but again the point is, the intensity and particularity of the people comprising, like they say, the Black Mountain scene, was absolute delight. I suppose the only problem was, in fact, how did one find an alternative —which obviously had to come.

INTERVIEWER

What are the common characteristics of the Black Mountain group?

CREELEY

I'd almost say—the *loner* quality each seems to have. There really isn't a common idiom, so to speak, as in the New York group, for example. I think there was a common feeling that verse was something *given* one to write, and that the form it might then take was intimate with that fact. That's what I at least meant by, "Form is never more than an extension of content."

INTERVIEWER

When did you meet Ginsberg?

CREELEY

In 1956—after leaving Black Mountain, it must have been in early January or so, then stopping in Albuquerque with friends to pull myself together, then going on to San Francisco where Ed Dorn and his family were. I was trying to get out of my own habits. My marriage had finally ended altogether—and I was sick of what I knew, so to speak. So anyhow I decided to go west. I got to Ed's place about four in the afternoon, and he and Helene drove me around a little. I remember we got very drunk or I at least did—and Rexroth had invited me over for dinner. I can remember vomiting all over the sidewalk, just before I went in, something like an hour or so late. Then later that same night, after Ed had taken off for a job he had as a baggage clerk at Greyhound, suddenly Allen appeared. He was working at the same place only on an earlier shift. It's so characteristic of Allen to be

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there like that, that is, to come so directly to what interests him. And I was god knows flattered—we talked most of the night about Olson and the scene at Black Mountain. And he told me what was happening in San Francisco. Later, I remember walking around the city with him and Phil Whalen, with Allen inevitably carrying the big black binder notebook, reading us "Howl" every time we sat down or stopped for something to eat. It was really a beautiful time—everything was so open, just poised on its own energies.

INTERVIEWER

You speak of corresponding with Williams and Pound. Did you correspond with your contemporaries? What sort of letters?

CREELEY

Insistently. I think at one point Olson and I were writing each other on the average of once every other day. *Mayan Letters* would give you some sense of it. The fact I was then so far away from everyone meant I depended on letters for a very necessary kind of conversation. Later, living in France, I had Denise Levertov and her husband, Mitch Goodman, to talk to—but more often than not there was really no one immediately available who shared the concerns I was having. Too, I very much needed a practical "feedback" and letters served that fact. For example, in the early 50's Paul Blackburn and I wrote each other constantly, and he'd give me a very close reading of the poems I'd send him—not just about what he thought they meant, but a literal line to line, word to word, sense of how he took the verse to be moving. So letters were very important to me, and I remember at one point, in Mallorca, calculating I was spending a full eight hours a day writing them. I think it was Williams who said once in a letter that they served as a kind of rehearsal of what it was we were to do.

INTERVIEWER

You have said that poetry is "the basic act of speech, of

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utterance." Are you implying that self-expression is the poet's motivation, or is there more to be said about his desire to communicate, his interest in possible readers?

CREELEY

I don't think that "possible readers" are really the context in which poetry is written. For myself it's never been the case. If one plays to the gallery in that way, I think it's extraordinarily distracting. The whole performance of writing then becomes some sort of odd entertainment of persons one never meets and probably would be embarrassed to meet in any case. So I'm only interested in what I can articulate with the things given me as confrontation. I can't worry about what it costs me. I don't think any man writing can worry about what the act of writing costs him, even though at times he is very aware of it.

INTERVIEWER

Communication *per se*, then, isn't a primary motive for the poet?

CREELEY

It is for some; for others, it isn't. It depends on what is meant by communication, of course. I would be very much cheered to realize that someone had felt what I had been feeling in writing—I would be very much reassured that someone had felt *with* me in that writing. Yet this can't be the context of my own writing. Later I may have horrible doubts indeed as to whether it will ever be read by other persons, but it can never enter importantly into my writing. So I cannot say that communication in the sense of telling someone is what I'm engaged with. In writing I'm telling something to myself, curiously, that I didn't have the knowing of previously. One time, again some years ago, Franz Kline was being questioned—not with hostility but with intensity, by another friend—and finally he said, "Well, look, if I paint what *you* know, then that will simply bore you, the repetition from me to you. If I paint what *I* know, it

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will be boring to myself. Therefore I paint what I don't know." Well, I believe that. I write what I don't know. Communication is a word one would have to spend much time defining. For example, can you make a blind man see? That has always been a question in my own mind. And if it is true that you cannot tell someone something he has no experience of, then the act of reading is that one is reading *with* someone. I feel when people read my poems most sympathetically, they are reading *with* me. So communication is mutual feeling with someone, not a didactic process of information.

INTERVIEWER

A side issue here, perhaps. Does an artist's "sincerity" have any influence on the quality of his work? Can a poet write good poems about a subject if he has no feeling about it?

CREELEY

I don't see how. If one respects Pound's measure of "Only emotion endures," and "Nothing counts save the quality of the emotion," then having no feelings about something seems to prohibit the possibility of that kind of quality entering. At the same time, there are many ways of feeling about things; it may be that—as in the case of poems by Ted Berrigan—one is made to feel by the fact that there is no attachment of subjective feeling to the words. It's a very subtle question. I remember one time Irving Layton wrote a very moving poem, "Elegy for Fred Smith." Later Gael Turnbull, very impressed by the poem, said to him, "You must feel very badly that your friend has died, because your poem concerning this fact is very, very moving." And Irving then explained that there was no man named Smith; he simply wanted to write this kind of poem. But you see, he wanted the feeling too; he wanted to gain the way one might feel in confronting such a possibility. There wasn't, as it happened, a real fact that provoked this poem, but there was certainly a feeling involved. And it was certainly a "subject" that Irving had "feeling" about. Of course, this issue of

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sincerity in itself can be a kind of refuge of fools. I am sure that Senator Goldwater was sincere in certain ways, but that shouldn't protect him from a hostile judgment. The zealot is often sincere. But I mean sincerity in the sense that goes back to Pound, that ideogram he notes: man standing by his word. *That* kind of sincerity has always been important to me—to what I'm doing.

INTERVIEWER

Undoubtedly there are pitfalls, too. Edgar Guest was probably as sincere as anyone writing today. Why wasn't Guest a Williams?

CREELEY

Again, you see, we have a simple answer. If we do believe that "Nothing counts save the quality of the emotion," then we have a clear measure for qualifying Guest—the emotion in Guest is of very poor quality. It's so generally articulated and so blurred with assumptional sentiment that it's a kind of mess. It's too general. So that would be the difference between him, I would feel, and someone like Williams who has the virtue of a much more complex and intimate and modulated quality of feeling—and is much more articulate in the area of that feeling, and not only gives evidence of it, but allows its evidence to be felt by the reader.

INTERVIEWER

This matter of the readers being allowed to feel their way through the poem, the active re-creation of experience. I'm not alone, I think, in feeling excluded from some modern poetry. I was reading the other day a poem by Gary Snyder, "How To Make Stew in the Pinacate Desert": "Now put in the strips of bacon. / In another pan have all the vegetables cleaned up and/peeled and sliced. / Cut the beef shank meat up small..." If technique is the rationale for Snyder's poem, have we gone too far with the present emphasis on technique?

CREELEY

The context of the poem is very relevant; perhaps I know

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too much about it. For example, it is addressed to two friends. What Gary's doing here is literally giving them a recipe for stew, and his *way* of speaking is evident. A tone or mode or kind of speech is occurring. Yes, you can literally take this poem as a recipe for how to make stew, but in this way of saying something there's also an emotional context, a kind of feeling. That, to my mind, is the significant part of this poem. It's the kind of address and the kind of feeling that is engendered by it; and it's the way the words go, literally, that is to me the most intimate aspect of this poem as poem. Now, what can we call it? Technique? Sure, there's technique in that the poem is articulated and held, in the way the words are placed in lines. There's a speed offered in the way the line is going there. But I don't think that he has gone too far, any more than I felt that the actual record of drilling that occurs in Williams' *Paterson* was going too far. It seemed to be very prosaic, but it gave an extraordinarily vivid sense of how far one did have to dig down to find what was intimate and vital to one's own needs. Just as the water was only to be found after having gone through all those levels, the very character of that report gave a real sense of what it is like to try to find something in an environment that is so covered, so much under the accumulation of refuse, and waste, and tedium, and misuse. So that I would rather not talk in that way of "technique" as something extensible or separate. And I would have respect for this particular poem of Gary's. Again I fall back on Pound's "Only emotion endures." This particular emotion is of an address to friends meant as a warmth which all three shall share, therefore anyone. In that possibility I find the most interest.

INTERVIEWER

Is the remarkable amount of obscenity in contemporary poetry the result of the letdown of barriers—or is it a reflection of the day's mood and temper?

CREELEY

One time Duncan was at a poetry workshop in Arizona,

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just after *Naked Lunch* had been published, and, as he said, the people were still writing poems about the moon and the rather indomitable onrush of the spring. That is, no one really rushed to say "fuck" just because it seemed now possible to do so in print. But then because one did want to be able to involve a total fact of persons, not just discreet edges thereof, it was a great relief I think to be able to do so. No doubt it's me, but I do think sexual mores have become much more relaxed in the last few years—and obscenity, or better, the words we so call obscene, have a very real energy. So one wants use of them as there seems occasion. I really dig, for example, Peter Orlovsky's journals that Ed Sanders has published sections of—not just for what they tell me of Peter but for what they make known to me as literal details of sexual event.

INTERVIEWER

How long does the writing of a poem take for you?

CREELEY

For me, it's literally the time it takes to type or otherwise write it—because I *do* work in this fashion of simply sitting down and writing, usually without any process of revision. So that if it goes—or, rather, comes—in an opening way, it continues until it closes, and that's usually when I stop. It's awfully hard for me to give a sense of actual time because as I said earlier, I'm not sure of time in writing. Sometimes it seems a moment and yet it could have been half an hour or a whole afternoon. And usually poems come in clusters of three at a time or perhaps six or seven. More than one at a time. I'll come into the room and sit and begin working simply because I feel like it. I'll start writing and fooling around, like they say, and something will start to cohere; I'll begin following it as it occurs. It may lead to its own conclusion, complete its own entity. Then, very possibly because of the stimulus of that, something further will begin to come. That seems to be the way I do it. Of course, I have no idea how much time it takes to write a poem in the sense

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of how much time it takes to accumulate the possibilities of which the poem is the articulation.

INTERVIEWER

Your surroundings during the time both of accumulating and writing—how significant are they?

CREELEY

Allen Ginsberg, for example, can write poems anywhere —trains, planes, in any public place. He isn't the least self-conscious. In fact, he seems to be stimulated by people around him. For myself, I need a very kind of secure quiet. I usually have some music playing, just because it gives me something, a kind of drone that I like, as relaxation. I remember reading that Hart Crane wrote at times to the sound of records because he liked the stimulus and this pushed him to a kind of openness that he could use. In any case, the necessary environment is that which secures the artist in the way that lets him be *in* the world in a most fruitful manner.

INTERVIEWER

What is your concept of the creative process *per se?* Would you agree with Williams' description of it: theoretic know-how plus "the imaginative quota, the unbridled mad-sound basis?"

CREELEY

Yes. One can learn a lot both by reading and by what you've accumulated by writing yourself. But then it's up to these occasions that come without much announcement and declare themselves quite apart from one's intentions. All the understanding of process possible doesn't ever guarantee their occurrence. And one curiously never does know just when or why or how or in what guise they will be present.

INTERVIEWER

No one can learn to write poetry, then? This total involvement of the poet—experiences, knowledge, technique, emo-

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tions—one is a poet perhaps by virtue of what he is, not by what he knows?

CREELEY

He's a poet in the sense that he's given the possibility of poetry by what seems to be a very mysterious process indeed. Naturally, all that he knows from his own writing and that of other writers helps to gain him articulation. It's rather like driving. A man who can't drive at all is obviously embarrassed to go down a road. The most "articulate" driver would be one who can follow the road with precisely the right response to each condition before him. The contexts are in some way equivalent.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have the sense of continually progressing—is there a sense in each successive poem of a new adventure?

CREELEY

A "new adventure" possibly—that is, like Melville's sense, "Be true to the dreams of thy youth," which Olson told me Melville had on the wall over his work table. I don't want to be *un*-romantic about it. But I have never felt I was going anywhere, in writing—not like, "Everyday, in every way, I am getting better and better." What I've really loved is the fact that at times I can *take place* in this activity, just be there with whatever comes of that fact. I live in this house, or with my wife, in just the same way. It's not "getting somewhere" that is the point of it all.

INTERVIEWER

You have spoken of a poem being created almost "in a fit," or in a seizure. Does it ever bother you to think that these attacks may not come? It seems such an American phenomenon to believe that the force of inspiration disappears in time.

CREELEY

It bothers me very damn much—but I've never found a

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cure for it. I don't know another writer who hasn't faced the same dilemma. But I don't know what one can do about it except hold on. I did realize finally that at times I was perversely enjoying my discontent, that is, I was all but wallowing in the inertia I felt I was stuck with. That's quickly a bore. But it's still true, of my own experience, that no amount of wanting to do something can actually make writing possible.

INTERVIEWER

Well, do you consciously choose your subjects?

CREELEY

Never that I've been aware of. I may make too much emphasis upon that, but I can't remember ever consciously setting out to write a poem literally *about* something. Well, I can think of an exception. That would be a sequence of poems done to complement Robert Indiana's *Numbers*—but after roughly a year of frustrated attempts to write these poems, the first five came to me, quite literally, between the hours of five and seven in the morning—a time I've never found possible for writing nor for much of anything else.

For myself, writing has always been the way of finding what I was feeling about, what so engaged me as "subject," and particularly to find the articulation of emotions in the actual writing. So, I don't choose my subjects with any consciousness whatsoever. I think once things have begun—that is, once there are three or four lines, then there begins to be a continuity of possibility engendered which I probably do follow. And I can recognize, say, looking back at what I have written, that some concerns have been persistent; the terms of marriage, relations of men and women, senses of isolation, senses of place in the intimate measure. But I have never to my own knowledge begun with any sense of "subject." I fall back on that point of Olson's—I think it's "Letter 15" in the Maximus poems where it goes: "He sd, 'You go all around the subject' and I sd, 'I didn't know it was a subject.' " You see, I don't know that poetry has

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"subjects" except as some sort of categorical reference for listing in library catalogs. Poetry has *themes*, that is, persistent contents which occur in poetry willy-nilly with or without the recognition of the writer. These themes are such as Olson once spoke of, war, love between man and woman, friendship, and the care of the earth. But I don't feel that these "subjects" are really the primary indication of the poem's merit or utility in the society in which it is present.

INTERVIEWER

You don't, then, have any "point" to make, to use a common term of reference?

CREELEY

The point I wish to make is that I am writing. Writing is my primary articulation. So when I write, that's what I'm at work with—an articulation of what confronts me, which I can't really realize or anticipate prior to the writing. I think I said in the introduction to *The Gold Diggers*, well over ten years ago, that if you say one thing it always will lead to more than you had thought to say. This has always been my experience.

INTERVIEWER

To look a little more closely at the "themes," then, in your work. Many seem to deal with love, hate—in short, human relationships. Is this human interaction the dominant interest from an artistic point of view?

CREELEY

Well, I've always been embarrassed for a so-called larger view. I've been given to write about that which has the most intimate presence for me, and I've always felt very, very edgy those few times when I have tried to gain a larger view. I've never felt right. I am given as a man to work with what is most intimate to me—these senses of relationship among people. I think, for myself at least, the world is most evident and most intense in those relationships. Therefore they are the materials of which my work is made.

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INTERVIEWER

Then, in general, are you writing about what is personally most important to you?

CREELEY

Yes. People are the most important things in the world for me. I don't at all mean that in a humanistic sense. It's just that they are the most insistent and most demanding and most complex presences offered to me.

INTERVIEWER

In some ways, this kind of subject is different from that of many of Williams' poems, which you admittedly admire. Is there a contradiction here?

CREELEY

Again, remember what Williams does say, "The poet thinks with his poem." When he has a poem such as the "Red Wheelbarrow," which occurs in that sequence *Spring and All*, a mixture of poetry and prose in its original version, that poem, and that whole sequence, is a way of perceiving—not decided upon but met, almost in full course, by "divine accident," as Stendhal would say. Williams says that particular sequence moves among the recognitions given him from his perceptions. That's what I am interested in, in those poems —not the literal material evident in the red wheelbarrow, but in *how* the perception occurs, how he thinks in the context of that relationship. Not simply *why* he says this, but *how* he says it, how he gives it credence, how he gives it recognition. We are both doing something quite akin: we're thinking, we're gaining an articulation for ourselves in the activity of the poem. As he says, "In our family we stammer until, half mad, we come to speech." Or he says, "the words made solely of air." This context for poetry is one very intimate and immediately recognizable to myself. So I don't think that you can say, "Well, this man talks about green bottles and this man talks about his wife; therefore, they are not interested in the same things." It's the way

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these things are perceived in the poem and how they are articulated that is significant; and in that respect I would feel a great debt to Williams and would feel that I had learned much from him indeed.

INTERVIEWER

Since two recent books are prose, *The Island* and the reissue of *The Gold Diggers*, could we talk for awhile about the differences between poetry and prose?

CREELEY

Well, prose seems to offer more variety in ways of approaching experience. It's more leisurely. One can experiment while en route, so to speak. But still, for me, poetry gives a more immediate, a more concentrated articulation—a finer way of speaking. I don't prefer either. I don't say poetry is more useful for me in *this* sense, and prose in *that* sense, and therefore I write a story when I want *this* effect, and a poem when I want *that* effect. They come and go. When something has been on my mind for a long, long time and I've been in some sense conscious of it, then very often it will be prose that gives me the chance of articulating what is dogging me with such emotional insistence. I think, for example, of a park in England where I was sitting with a friend; and I was very new to our surroundings. I felt not alien but freshly arrived. We were sitting in this quiet park on a Sunday afternoon, a small sort of intimate family park with walks, not hidden exactly, but arranged so that people moved along through corridors of trees and plants, so that one had a constantly changing vista of persons as they came and went. And there was a kind of old statue, not particularly distinct or admirable but sort of interesting, as if a kind of old person had suddenly been immobilized or concretized. But in any case, that moment, sitting on that bench, talking in this rather random fashion and watching the people and seeing children all ages, impressed itself on my mind. I don't know what I'm going to do with it—or rather, I don't know what it's going to do with me. But that kind of insistence

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—it's one of the most intense things which I seem to have gained in England. I don't know what it means. I don't understand it. I don't know why—of all the kinds of experience that I had there—that moment suddenly is awfully intense. But at some moment that's probably something that's *coming* to be written. I feel it now, that it's coming, that I shall work with it. And when I do work with it, I would feel it will probably be with prose because it has such a complexity in it that I'll want to move with it tentatively. Prose may give me a way of feeling my way through such a thing. Poetry is more often a kind of absolute seizure—a demand that doesn't offer variations of this kind.

INTERVIEWER

So prose is very much in your future, as well as poetry?

CREELEY

I must say that as soon as I *plan* to do more prose, I do absolutely nothing. I had planned to do another novel, because I really enjoyed *The Islands*, having learned in a sense some of the technical possibilities of such a form—that is, having written it—I gained some insight into what technically was possible in a long prose piece. I wanted not to lose it, so I very quickly committed myself to do another novel, which was unwise of me. I even gave the novel a title, and had what I thought was a good occasion (two years I spent in Guatemala had given me a crazily chaotic impression of so many things and persons and acts—such a wild variability of people in such a very curiously primal place—that I thought, this is an ideal thing to work with in prose). But as soon as I planned to do it, I all but stopped. I don't know how I am going to get past that. One day I'll simply sit down and start writing. Until that day comes, talking about it is a little absurd because I simply don't work in that fashion. By planning to do the novel, and by talking about it with my publisher, accepting a small advance and giving it this title and all, I seem—well, one moment last spring, for example, I really got almost hysterical and I called the

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publisher and said, "Look, I want to pay you back that money. I'm sick to death of the whole program." No, again, you see, Pound is so right. That quote he has from Remy de Gourmont, "Freely to write what one chooses is the sole pleasure of a writer." That is so true. So that as soon as it becomes programmed in any way, in the sense that it isn't momently recognized, it's a very, very problematic context in which to try anything.

INTERVIEWER

Were your short stories written usually in one movement? Like the poems?

CREELEY

Right. Again that's why I say that the kind of economy that Pollock was speaking of was very real to me... when he said, "When I am *in* my painting..." I remember one time in the 50's a conversation Guston was having with my first wife. She'd challenged him: "If you're painting this way, abstract-expressionism or whatever you call it, how do you know when it's done?" She really was suggesting that he was in some way a phony, and that everything he was involved in was in some way phony. He took the question seriously, and gave her a very careful and generous statement of his own experience of painting. His resolution was that you know when it's done when you are both looking at and involved with what's happening, and you can't see any place where further activity is permitted. I mean, where everything has happened. And I knew that was precisely how I felt about writing, that when I couldn't say anything more, that was the end. You continued writing and/or speaking until no further possibility of continuing was there. And I thought this was what these particular men as Kline, or as Guston, or as De Kooning—not De Kooning so much because his formal procedure was rather different—but Pollock, absolutely—that they were not so much "experimenting," but that they were delighted and moved and engaged by an activity—*permitted* an experience of something—and that they

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were with it as long as it was possible to be. And at some point it ended. I mean *it* stopped, and they were thus pushed out, or made to stop too, and that was it.

INTERVIEWER

There exists at the moment a large group of young poets writing what have been called by some "Creeley poems." Short, terse, poignant—at their best. You know, of course, you have tremendous influence on the generation to come. Do you think this influence is good?

CREELEY

I haven't the least idea. That's up to them to demonstrate. At a poetry conference, Robert Duncan—hearing many poems dedicated to himself—said, "My God, do I really sound like that?" There's a kind of horror in seeing what's taken from one's own acts as the significant aspect of them, played back. This kind of active feedback provides a very interesting disarrangement and what people make of my work in this way has sometimes delighted me and sometimes left me very disgruntled. But I don't think it's up to me to decide whether it's good or bad. It will demonstrate its own virtues or failures.

INTERVIEWER

Where can these young writers move in this imitative writing?

CREELEY

Again, I haven't the least sense of where they can go in their poetry. That is very much their own business—as it was mine and remains mine. We return to that sense of Olson's that each of us has his own "kin and concentration." So that for me to propose large rules for all poets would be absurd. I feel simply that all those engaged as poets can take what they will from what I may have discovered or from what those before me have discovered or what men after me will discover. Obviously, there's no end to it, but I believe it should all be handed over and that it can or cannot be used as each person learns for himself.

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INTERVIEWER

What is the pattern? Will these young writers stay imitative?

CREELEY

No, they won't. Imitation is a way of gaining articulation. It is the way one learns, by having the intimate possibility of some master like Williams or Pound. Writing poems in those modes was a great instruction to me when I began to "feel" what Williams was doing as well as "understand" it. This imitative phase is a natural thing in artists. I feel it should be encouraged. It is one way to learn, and it's the way I would respect, coming as I do from a rural background where learning how to plow is both watching someone else do it and then taking the handle of the plow and seeing if you can imitate, literally, his way of doing it, therefore gaining the use of it for yourself. But what you then plow—and whether you plow or not—is your own business. And there are, fortunately, many ways to do it.

—LINDA WAGNER

—LEWIS MACADAMS, JR.

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Robert Creeley

The Finger

Either in or out of
the mind, a conception
overrides it. *So that*
that time I was a stranger,

bearded, with clothes that were
old and torn. I was told,
it was known to me, my
fate would be timeless. Again

and again I was to
get it right, the story I
myself knew only the way of,
but the purpose if it

had one, was not mine.
The quiet shatter of the light,
the image folded into
endlessly opening patterns—

had they faced me into
the light so that my
eye was blinded? At moments
I knew they had gone but

searched for her face, the pureness
of its beauty, the endlessly sensual—
but no sense as that now reports it.
Rather, she was beauty, that

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Aphrodite I had known of,
and caught sight of as *maid*—
a girlish openness—or known
as a woman turned from the light.

I knew, however, the other,
perhaps even more. She was there
in the room's corner, as she would be,
bent by a wind it seemed

would never stop blowing,
braced like a seabird,
with those endlessly clear grey eyes.
Name her, Athena—what name.

The osprey, the sea, the waves.
To go on telling the story,
to go on though no one hears it,
to the end of my days?

Mercury, Hermes, in dark glasses.
Talk to him—but as if
one talked to the telephone,
telling it to please listen—

is that right, have I said it—
and the reflecting face echoes
some cast of words in mind's eye
attention a whip of surmise.

And the power to tell
is glory. One unto one
unto one. And though all
mistake it, it is one.

I saw the stones thrown
at her. I felt a radiance transform
my hands and my face.
I blessed her, I was one.

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Are there other times?
Is she that woman,
or this one. Am I the man—
and what transforms.

Sit by the fire.
I'll dance a jig I learned
long before we were born
for you and you only then.

I was not to go
as if to somewhere,
was not in the mind
as thinking knows it,

but danced in a jigging
intensive circle
before the fire and its heat
and that woman lounging.

How had she turned herself?
She was largely warm—
flesh heavy—and smiled
in some deepening knowledge

There are charms.
The pedlar and the small dog
following and the whistled,
insistent song.

I had the pack,
the tattered clothing,
was neither a man nor not one,
all that—

and who was she
with the fire behind her,
in the mess of that place,
the dust, the scattered pieces,

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her skin so warm,
so massive, so stolid in her
smiling the charm did not
move her but rather

kept her half-sleepy attention,
yawning, indulging the manny
who jiggled a world before her
made of his mind.

She was young,
she was old,
she was small.
She was tall with

extraordinary grace. Her face
was all distance, her eyes
the depth of all one had thought of
again and again and again.

To approach, to hold her,
was not possible
She laughed and turned
and the heavy folds of cloth

parted. The nakedness
burned. Her heavy breath
her ugliness, her lust—
but her laughing, her low

chuckling laugh, the way
she moved her hand to the
naked breast, then to
her belly, her hand with its fingers.

Then *shone*—
and whatever is said
in the world, or forgotten,
or not said, makes a form.

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The choice is simply,
I will—as mind is a finger,
pointing, as wonder
a place to be.

Listen to me, let
me touch you
there. You are young again,
and you are looking at me.

Was there ever
such foolishness more
than what thinks it knows
and cannot see, was there ever

more? Was the truth
behind us, or before?
Was it one
or two, and who was I?

She was laughing, she was
laughing at me
and I danced, and
I danced.

Lovely, lovely woman, let
me sing, *one to*
one to one, and let
me follow.

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Picasso Indian Summer

William Fifield

On the table was a volume of Rembrandt reproductions, and a box of English cigarettes—one of which is eventually smoked by Mme. Cuttoli who does not know one goes outside to smoke in order not to stimulate the desire to smoke in Picasso. In the thousands of photographs, he always had a cigarette in his mouth or fingers.

There are ten of us seated around the table: Picasso and his wife, and eight guests.

Mme. Cuttoli: It is so cool here.

Picasso: I like it hot. I like the *sun*. When it's cold—no, I am miserable. *(He imitates a poor wretch shivering.)*

Fifield: One of your biographers sets out to explain you as the typical Malaga type, saying how he has seen dozens like you along La Caleta. I know you were born in Malaga when your father was instructor there in the art school. I asked Cocteau if you were Andalusian. He said yes.

Picasso: They called me "The Andaluz" when I came to Barcelona. Not because of what I was but because of where I came from. Then "Picasso"—because Ruiz was a common name and Picasso wasn't. My mother was from Cordoba. My father Basque. The double *ss*—that is not Spanish.

Fifield: No.

Piccasso: And the legend is that Italians came to Spain—it is just the reverse. Spaniards went to Italy. There was a General Picasso there, and a painter... Matteo Picasso. His works are still in the museum of Genoa. But the name was "Picazo" and the "z" was Italianized.

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Fifield: But that's not your line of the family?
Picasso: No! Pure Spanish.
Fifield: How is it then you have the double "ss" and not the "z"?
Picasso: Ah. Who knows. The "z" was probably Arab. Cordoba—seat of the caliphate: and they used the "z" in their language.

Dürrbach and Jacqueline de la Baume were there essentially about the tapestry which they had woven after "*Les Trois Danseurs*" of Picasso for Nelson Rockefeller. *(Picasso:* "They ought to have called it Les Trois Dans*euses*. The critics called it Les Trois Dans*eurs*. They haven't noticed the evident attributes. They are very abstract people.") Mme. Cuttoli launched the first tapestry reproductions of Picasso, Léger, Braque, Dufy in the 20's; the Gobelin man from the French national tapestry industry is a nondescript chap with a blank face chalked on and a town shirt oddly tieless; his wife is in tight cotton slacks: the German tourist image, or Texan; the surgeon and his wife: he removed Picasso's gall bladder eighteen months before.

Picasso *looks* no older than he did in 1960, or five and a half years ago when he was eighty at Vallauris, or three years ago in this same room at Notre-Dame de Vie. Perhaps he looks a little smaller. His eyes are as black and interested as ever. Are they softer? You note with surprise that the pupil and iris make one; one black olive, this is unusual or even unique in human anatomy. The black, intense vision is not merely spiritual, any more than camera-stop swiftness of vision was spiritual with Leonardo da Vinci. Sabartes wrote that in the early days in Barcelona Picasso would not sing, would hardly converse, in order to concentrate everything in the optic faculty. His eyes are as intent as before, but not as *intense*. He *seized* one with his eyes, now he is regardful. Yet words falsify, for at moments he is as burning as ever. Picasso has the odd habit of leaning up toward one as he listens. No other aged person so literally *heeds* you as you speak, and certainly no other world-celebrity or genius. Once you pass out

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of range he forgets you in fixing on some other thing. Nothing fierce about him now. He wears a beige wool polo shirt, tight pegged St. Tropez pants of fabric mottled like leopard spotting, and it is long since the days when he wore rough garb resembling a Paris worksman's, although he was then past fifty and rich. At one interval he sips, from an enormous cup into which he puts almost his whole face, what I take to be *tisane* tea.

Jacqueline is very trim in a summery yellow blouse and narrow white trousers.

"Your appearance is different in one respect, madame, from the last time I was here."

"Yes?"

"You are wearing shoes."

"Oh yes. I usually go barefoot."

The room is entirely different but unchanged. One clutter has replaced another.

Someone asks: "Where is the something-or-other?"

Picasso: To find anything here, ask Jacqueline. *La femme. Cherchez la femme.*

Jacqueline (smiles): The legal one. The second and last legal one.

Picasso (soberly): I have had two wives. Two. The one died and I married another.

I am beginning to grasp what I had at first sensed: it is Jacqueline who looks older and not Picasso. Older? Well, she must have been about forty and looked thirty; now she looks the age she is. Difficult (we are to post-mortem the following day) to share the bed, under the vicuna cover, of a man about half a century older than you are. There are two utterly different stories about Jacqueline Roque; the one current in the Vallauris-Cannes area, but I believe the second. The first has it that she was an ambitious woman who went purposefully to Madoura *Plein-Feu* in Vallauris and became a salesgirl there where they fired Picasso's pottery. But then I was told by chance in Bordeaux, by the daughter of a wine merchant who lives in French West Africa, that Jacqueline's first husband in French West Africa was not merely a satyr

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who went after every woman, but a sadist who made a point of driving them in his open convertible under his and Jacqueline's apartment window until she was utterly broken. Then Picasso gave her back to herself. And the former husband goes on shaking his head forever that Jacqueline is Mme. Picasso. Suffice it: she was a saleswoman at Madoura and she married Picasso. On the wall is the first portrait of Jacqueline, "Portrait of Mme Z." It was shown at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in 1955. Everyone now knows the Z-face profile.

At the other end of the wall is a self-portrait from the *Demoiselles* period—Picasso looking like a thug, or Gertrude Stein (as he rendered her). On chairs and a large sofa, strewn photos, many of them in color, of Picasso or Jacqueline—Picasso sometimes barechested. A cluster of golden bells like a grape bunch hangs on the door to the inner studio—Picasso disappears there. One glimpses a warehouse of stacked canvases, ranged statuary: the bells chime. The door has reopened. "I was looking for something I wanted to show you. I cannot find it. We would have to move everything."

Jacqueline: He has begun painting again. Last month. No... six weeks ago.

Picasso: I work. Work is the thing. To work is the thing.

Fifield: Do you work every day?

Picasso: All the time. All the time.

Jacqueline: He hadn't painted for eighteen months. Since he had his gall bladder out.

I ask if I can see the paintings.

And Jacqueline says gently that it would be too soon—he is unsure, and his hand is forming. But, nonetheless, one of the paintings is on the wall by the door—a kind of d'Artagnan —a cavalier of the time of Richelieu, black curls and black goatee. Washes of blue background—like the portrait of Don Quixote or Velasquez or Cervantes in the Picasso Museum in Barcelona. The cavalier of Dumas has his nose squashed to one side. The composition—at no point concretely—it is the thick white of the paint—makes one think of the paintings of Picasso's Dalmatian *Perro* which used to stand about the walls. One is struck by something: there are no dogs in the house now.

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Picasso: One isn't the same half an hour before or half an hour after. That's why I date my paintings. If you put a bird on a blue background it won't be the same as a bird you put on a red background. It can't be, can it? I work every day. That's the thing that matters.
Fifield: You have been a great apostle of work. Do you think that each piece of work creates work? The movement makes movement?
Picasso: It creates its elaboration or its opposite.
Fifield: I'll tell you one genius I've consulted you might not think of. Ortega. Domingo Ortega, the matador.
Picasso: Why do you think he was a genius?
Fifield: Because he was inexplicable. He was in his twenties when he became a matador, which is very old. Luis Miquel Dominguin's father launched Ortega after only seven *novilladas* in Barcelona. You may know about that. And Ortega was first matador of Spain the next year, doing absolutely everything.
Picasso: Those are the ears of Ortega over there hanging from the chandelier. Not Ortega's ears! The ears of Ortega's bull.
Fifield: The pint-size *bichos*...
Picasso: Were you there for my birthday? The *becerros!*—from Ortega's own ranch. You remember that he and Luis Miguel came up to fight them for my birthday. *Que raro!*—they came up to their knees.
Fifield: But it was a chance to see Ortega.
Picasso: And you saw Cordobes at Arles, Saturday?
Fifield: Yes.
Picasso: How was he?
Fifield: Terrible. Have you ever seen him?
Picasso: Once at Fréjus.
Fifield: How was he?
Picasso: Terrible.
Fifield: But you know they forced him back into the ring—when he wanted to retire. The *cuadrilla* says he doesn't care at all, has lost all his *aficion*, and just wants to collect his one million two hundred thousand pesetas an afternoon and decamp. But it isn't all cynical. At the *barrera* at Arles, Julian

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Marin, the only Frenchman who has had a chance of being a real matador in thirty years but who had the misfortune to have his fingers cut off in an industrial accident, saw him in a rage—Why did you have this bull sent in first and not the other one? he screamed at his *peon-de-confianza*. How can I set the fight going with this *manso*?!

Picasso: He is a marvelous fellow. Great heart.

Fifield: A complete intuitional rustic—

Picasso: Yes—he is from Cordoba.

Fifield: Worse. Palma del Rio.

Picasso (laughs): Yes, that is even worse!

Fifield: Hélène Parmelin says you have complained that nobody ever comes to you and asks you about painting. You have been almost wistful, according to her. Without wishing to put on airs, you do know something about it, you say, but they never ask you. Talk turns to politics, literature. You butt in and you feel as if they really wanted to send you out of the room. I have my tape recorder in the car and—

Picasso: No. I—. *Nada. Nada.*

I think I know well enough why Picasso does not talk about art—never has done—so that Sabartes alone, who has known him for just less than seventy years, has garnered his ideas into books, random harvest of a thousand conversations. Kahnweiler himself, his art dealer almost continually since the first decade of the century, had to tune his ears without ever showing a notebook, and then excusing himself run into the WC and scribble out his recollection of what Picasso had said. Reason for all this, when you are *there*, very probably that the incongruity that this small man is actually the agency of all he has done, the incredible achievement, that this is actually Picasso, strikes Picasso too. His work is what happens when he, a pencil and a piece of canvas come together, he has usually said; and he has said to me: "How are you to talk of music, separating the musician from his violin?" "It is not I who do it but the Other." What does this mean except that he is a library and storeroom of superimpositions, a hundred faces into which he shifts and out of which he shifts—had I not seen Cocteau look up at me with

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a flicker of tender comprehension when I spoke to Picasso of the connoisseur/creator dichotomy I had observed in himself and Cocteau? Bull man? Certainly. But one must not oversimplify. Some of his closest friends have observed him as timid. He is, this summer, tranquil, oddly.

Mme. Cuttoli and the doctor's wife have gone off to catch their train for Paris. At some point, the Gobelin people, who never said a word, have disappeared.

In the corridor to the stairs, which will lead to the statuary below, there are crates and crates of canvases. You are startled to come upon—in the helter-skelter clutter—pictures you have seen reproduced a thousand times. A large full-face nude reigns at the foot of the stairs.

Glimpses. He touches the banister as he starts down the stairs. But then he releases it and he walks down steadily.

Downstairs, Dürrbach discourses, and Picasso listens attentively, his hands crossed on his middle. He is quite solemn. The subject is a screen made by Picasso two decades ago. Rigorous scheme of spaces and crescents, which appeals to Dürrbach, though on the back, a panel in *pointilliste* rococo like "*Ma Jolie*" Cubism. "It is hard to trace a line," Dürrbach informs Picasso, "but easy to fill in, which is what most painters do." And Picasso listens and then thoughtfully nods.

There are slim bronzes of twenty years ago aligned on a table, two dozen or more, that might be by Giacometti, but with the smoothness of Brancusi. Picasso stands one of them up, reflectively, and puts his thumb on his lip and looks at the statue, then lays it back down. There is the wire construction of Chicago. There are the pectoral, abdominal Congolese women made out of scrap. There are the enormous concrete heads of the Boisgeloup period with their tremendous tomahawk noses and great thyroid eyes like lumps of clay stuck on.

At the end of the room is a plaster of one of the Prisoners of Michelangelo—one of those cut for the unrealized tomb of Julius II—it looks very feminine among the gross, swollen women of Picasso.

"Feet—too shallow," points Picasso. "He cut too deeply and lacked marble. Too much anatomy" *(touching the body, the*

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ribs and thorax) "spoils plastic effect of unity and breaks up play of light. You can't have so much play of ridges and muscles." He touches the genitals. "Mannerist."

He wanders away and goes over to an old sofa in petit point standing in a corner, Jacqueline following watchfully. I understand why she is tired. "*Canevas*," he says. "That's good training. Very modern. That's what our grandmothers did. It's all one"

Coming back up when we have finished below, Jacqueline takes his arm and they mount together, two very small people.

Upstairs, talking of *toreros*, we drift into Spanish, closed off from the others within a linguistic room. His thought has perhaps moved back to the peculiarity that I speak Spanish.

Do you *live* in Spain, then? he asks.

In Ibiza.

If you want to talk to geniuses why don't you go see Miro? He lives in Mallorca.

But I don't know his work well enough.

He'd only say yes, yes, yes or no, no, no—agreeing with you. He never says anything about his art. *Tiene razón. No vale la pena. Casi siempre no vale la pena.*

"Don't go out, Pablo. It is cold," says Jacqueline when we are about to leave. And he stands in the hallway, with his mouth pursed and his eyes very wide open, waving.

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Notes on Contributors

INTERVIEWS

Harold Flender is the author of a novel, *Paris Blues*, and a non-fiction book, *Rescue in Denmark*. He has contributed to *The Nation*, *The Saturday Review*, and *The New Leader*.

Lewis MacAdams, Jr. has published a book of poems, *City Money*. He is an editor of *Mother* records.

Linda Wagner is the author of *The Poems of William Carlos Williams: A Critical Study* (Wesleyan University Press). Her articles, stories and poems have appeared in many publications including *Kenyon Review*, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, and *Minnesota Review*.

CHRONICLE

William Fifield's novels include *The Devil's Marchioness*, *The Sign of Taurus*, and *Matadors*. He is the co-author with Alexis Lichine of *The Wines and Spirits of the World*.

FICTION

Keith Cohen's short stories have appeared in *The Columbia Review* and *Art and Literature*. At present, he is studying at Princeton University on a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship.

Maurice Roche has published two books: a study of Monteverdi and *Compact*. His second novel, *Circus*, will soon be published in Paris by Editions du Seuil.

James Salter's novels include *The Hunters*, *The Arm of Flesh*, and *A Sport and a Pastime* (Paris Review Editions). He has written films for Losey and Lumet, and is now directing his own film, *Three*.

Ronald Sukenick is the author of *Wallace Stevens: Musing the Obscure* and *UP*, a novel recently published by Dial Press. "What's Your Story" will be included in a forthcoming collection, *The Death of the Novel, and Other Stories*.

Joy Williams' story, "The Roomer," appeared in the 1966 *O. Henry Prize Story Collection*. She is at present working on a novel.

ART

Claisse's work is shown in Paris at the Denise René gallery.

Olivier Mosset's paintings have been shown in Paris at the Salon de la Jeune Peinture and the 1967 Biennale.

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POETRY

Joseph Ceravolo has published two books of poems: *Fits of Dawn* ("C" Press) and *Wild Flowers Out of Gas* (Tibor de Nagy Press).

Jack Collom is the author of two books of poems: *April* and *Wet.*

James Koller is an editor of Coyote Press. His most recent books of poems are *Some Cows* and *The Dogs, & Other Dark Woods.*

Diane di Prima's work has appeared in many magazines, as well as in three books: *The New Handbook of Heaven, Dinners & Nightmares,* and *Seven Love Poems from the Middle Latin.*

David Shapiro's book of poems, *January,* was published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston. He received a 1967 Ingram Merrill Foundation grant for translation and poetry.

John Thorpe has published poems in *Mother.*

Laurance Wieder has published poems in *The Columbia Review.*

John Wieners is the author of three books of poetry: *The Hotel Wentley Poems, Ace of Pentacles,* and *Pressed Wafer.* His *Selected Poems* will soon be published by Fulcrum Press in London.

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editor: Trevor Winkfield

editorial & business address:

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Harry's New-York Bar

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Tel: 073 73-00 Cable: Cocktails-Paris

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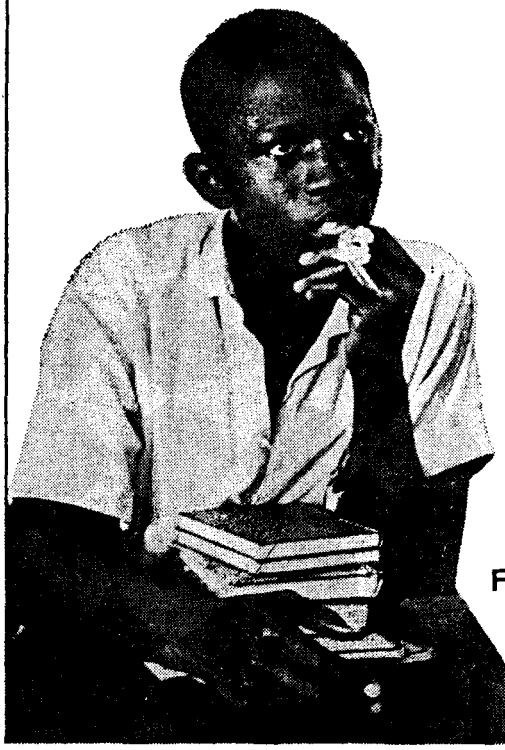

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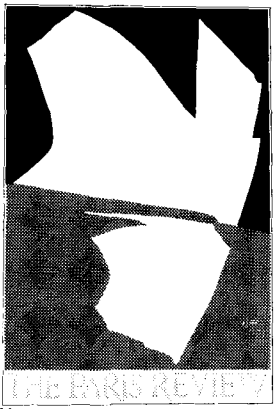

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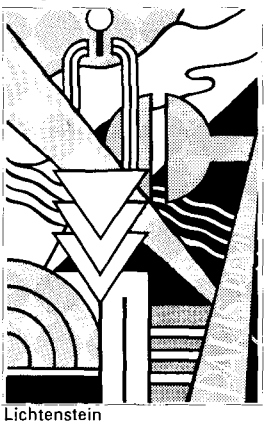

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